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MARIE ANTOINETTE'S YOUTH

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Translated from the German by
GEORGE P. UPTON

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MARIE ANTOINETTE, Queen of France

(From a painting by Mme. Lebrun)

LIFE STORIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

MARIE ANTOINETTE'S YOUTH

Translated from the German of Dr. Heinrich von Lenk

BY

GEORGE P. UPTON

Translator of "Memories" and "Immensee," author of "Upton Handbooks on Music," editor "Autobiography of Theodore Thomas," etc., etc.

WITH FIVE ILLUSTRATIONS

CHICAGO

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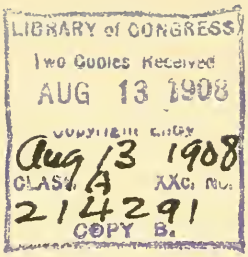

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Translator's Preface

THE two volumes, "Maria Theresa" and "The Little Dauphin," which have already appeared in the series of "Life Stories for Young People," contain much valuable information concerning Marie Antoinette. The present volume gives us a still clearer insight into her character and the circumstances which led up to her tragic fate. This story of her life begins with her earliest childhood and closes as the clouds are gathering and the shadow of the guillotine looms darkly before her. It is the story of her youth — of a girl, fond of pleasure and display, given to excesses and extravagances, married in her fifteenth year, for reasons of state policy, to the young French Dauphin, then but sixteen, who was kindly but dull and inert, excellent in his intentions, but without resolution to put them to practice; the story of a queen who imperilled her character and laid herself open to unjust calumnies by her wild caprices, and who alienated her people by her disregard of them and her inability to comprehend them; of a woman who gave up her pleasures and vanities for the sake of her children; and of a sovereign who at last proved herself worthy of the name and fame of her great mother, Maria Theresa,

by expiating her faults upon the guillotine, with a queenly dignity and lofty courage that extorted admiration even from her bitterest calumniators. She had many faults, and yet there can be only a feeling of pity for the little princess, sacrificed for the ambitions of her mother, and sent to France to become the queen of a people who hated her, intrigued against her, and made her the victim of the basest and most unjust libels. The story, as told in these pages, is a picturesque panorama of her young life — her childhood days, espousal, and marriage; the daily routine of her life at Versailles; the old-fashioned etiquette at which she revolted, and the absurd fashions of the time; the intrigues of factions and disappointed favorites; domestic troubles; the life at Trianon; her musical studies, with glimpses of the Gluck-Piccini war; the visits of Voltaire and Rousseau; the incident of the diamond necklace which raised such a storm about the innocent Queen; and finally the outburst of popular hatred which culminated at the guillotine. There is no more fascinating figure in history than that of Marie Antoinette.

G. P. U.

CHICAGO, 1908.

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Marie Antoinette's Youth

"VERITÉ—RIEN QUE VERITÉ, TOUTE LA VERITÉ"

Chapter I

Marie Antoinette's Education

ON the second of November, 1755, six months before the outbreak of the Seven Years' War, the south of Europe was shaken by a terrible earthquake. Lisbon was destroyed; thirty thousand people perished; the King and Queen of Portugal were forced to flee from their palace, which was reduced to ruins. This was All Souls' Day, and on that same day Marie Antoinette was born. Her parents were Francis Stephen of Tuscany and Maria Theresa of Austria. At her baptism she received the names Maria Antonia Josephine Johanna.

The life at Maria Theresa's court was simple, almost homely in fact, and etiquette, though not entirely dispensed with in the palace and at Schönbrunn, was by no means rigorous. The Queen of France always spoke of her childhood with pleasure, yet her father, the Emperor Francis, seems to have been closer to his children than their mother.

Accustomed to rule and to be obeyed, the Empress inspired respect in her family also. They never forgot that she was the sovereign, a fact which often repressed their natural affection. Matters of policy and the cares of state, moreover, left Maria Theresa little time to devote herself to her children. The court physician was required to visit the archdukes and archduchesses each morning and bring her a detailed report as to their health and condition, but she often did not see them herself more than once a week.

Their education was intrusted to tutors and governesses, in the selection of whom she showed the greatest care, and she also arranged in a general way their courses of study; but as she had no time to see that her directions were carried out, the teachers naturally were over-indulgent toward the imperial children. Marie Antoinette's first governess was dismissed because the Empress chanced to discover that she had been writing her pupil's copy for her. The Countess Brandeisen, who took her place, was devoted to her charge, who warmly returned the affection; but she too spoiled the child. Whenever she did attempt to be firm and lecture the little Archduchess severely, a pleading word or a caress was enough to dispel her anger and make her as easy and indulgent as before.

Marie Antoinette remained under the care of this

lady until her twelfth year, and always considered it a misfortune that she had come to her so late and been forced to leave her so early. The Countess Lerchenfeld, who succeeded the Frau von Brandeisen, had much more firmness and strength of character, but she was sickly and irritable and quite ill-suited to assume the charge of a gay and lively young girl.

The poet Metastasio gave the Archduchess lessons in Italian and taught her to speak that language with ease and fluency, also to read it without difficulty, and all her life she profited by the teachings of Gluck, who was her music-master; but although she had the best teachers in other studies also, she made no progress except in these two branches — a fact of which Maria Theresa frequently complains in her letters. The Archduchess Antonia, as she was called in Vienna, wrote very ungrammatically, and her handwriting was almost illegible. Even her drawings had to be corrected by the governess before she dared exhibit them to her mother. Of geography she knew less than many a child of the common people, and she was almost wholly ignorant not only of general history but of that of her own race and country. She was not lacking in ability so much as in the desire to learn, but her ignorance was so great it could not escape notice; and afterwards in France it caused

her to be considered stupid. Whatever may have been her mental deficiencies, she was eminently fitted to shine in social life. Even as a child her ease and grace of manner were remarkable, and she won the hearts of the people whenever she came in contact with them, by her beauty and kindness of heart.

Although, as we have seen, Maria Theresa had not much time to give to her children, she liked to appear before the world as the devoted mother, and whenever eminent personages visited Vienna she usually received them in the midst of her numerous family. Allusions in the newspapers to the princes and princesses, praising their beauty or their cleverness, gave her the greatest pleasure, and anecdotes concerning them were eagerly repeated by her loyal subjects. One winter day, for instance, when Antonia gave away all her spending-money to the poor, the story quickly spread from mouth to mouth; and the Viennese never tired of repeating the witty repartees of herself and sisters. It was quite true that the Empress's daughters could recite Latin on occasions, but the people little knew that the young princesses did not understand a word of what they repeated.

For hundreds of years the reigning house of France had been forced to defend itself against the

Hapsburgs, who, by possessing Austria, Spain, and Holland, surrounded it on three sides. Gradually the situation had changed, however. The conquests of Richelieu and Mazarin, together with Louis the Fifteenth's victories and defeats, had altered the map of Europe. The Hapsburgs were driven forever from Spain. A new power, the house of Hohenzollern, had arisen in Germany, and signs were not lacking that France and Austria were disposed to bury the past. Maria Theresa's father, the Emperor Charles the Sixth, made the first advances, and Cardinal Fleury, Louis the Fifteenth's first minister during his minority, was not averse to accepting them. As for the young Empress, the hostility of the King of Prussia made such an alliance of the greatest importance to her. During the war between France and Prussia she offered a separate peace to France, and even after this had been concluded she continued her friendly overtures. History tells us that the virtuous Maria Theresa even went so far as to send a letter to Madame de Pompadour in which she addressed her as "Dear friend." The Empress denies this in her private correspondence, but there is no doubt that whatever she did not care to do in person was done for her by Count Kaunitz, her confidential adviser.

France showed herself by no means insensible to Austria's professions of friendship, and in the year

1756 Louis the Fifteenth entered into an alliance with Maria Theresa that resulted in the Seven Years' War. Anxious to retain the allies she had just secured, the Empress's bold and ambitious mind conceived the plan of uniting the two houses by marriage. King Louis and his minister Choiseul agreed to this arrangement, and she selected her youngest daughter as the future Queen of France, hoping her beauty would do more toward winning over the neighboring Kingdom than her armies would ever be able to accomplish. This marriage between the Austrian Archduchess and the Dauphin of France was settled upon long before it was made known to the world.

When Antonia was eleven years old Madame Geoffrin, the French *savante*, made a visit to Vienna, where she was most graciously received by the Empress and presented to all her daughters. The Frenchwoman was enchanted with the appearance of the youngest princess.

"What a charming child!" she exclaimed. "I should like to run away with her!"

"Take her!" returned Maria Theresa, greatly pleased; "take her home with you, then!"

She gave Madame Geoffrin plainly to understand that she would like to have the child praised and admired by the learned and witty favorite of French salons, who did not fail to carry out the Empress's

desires. Accordingly there was much talk in the capital the following Winter of the beauty and amiability of the future Dauphiness. Through his envoys Louis the Fifteenth kept himself informed of her development; a famous artist was despatched to Vienna to paint her portrait, and such was the King's impatience to see it that the painter had to send his son to Versailles with the portrait the moment it was finished.

Maria Theresa spared no pains to prepare her daughter for the position that awaited her. Among the French masters provided for the Archduchess was an actor, who was employed to read aloud to her. His reputation was not of the best, and his appointment met with great disapproval at the French court. The Ambassador at Vienna was directed to make this known to the Empress, who instantly dismissed the actor and begged that a priest might be sent from France as tutor to her daughter. Upon the recommendation of the Archbishop of Toulouse the Abbé Vermond was chosen for this position. On arriving at Vienna he proceeded to lay out a complete course of study, which met with the entire approval of the Empress. He proposed to instruct the Archduchess in religious matters as well as in the history and literature of France, and to direct her attention especially to composition and spelling; but in spite of the Abbé's

good intentions he was quite unable to inspire Marie Antoinette with any love for learning. In his memoirs he writes: "It was impossible to interest her in any subject whatsoever, although it was plain that she did not lack ability had she cared to exert herself."

Marie Antoinette had not completed her tenth year when she lost her father. Just before setting out for Innspruck, where he was to attend the marriage of his second son, the Emperor asked for his daughter Antonia to be brought to him. "I feel that I must embrace the child once more," he said, as he folded her in his arms for the last time. A few days later, while seated at his son's wedding-feast, he suddenly fell dead. His death was a hard blow to his children, but harder still for the devoted wife, whose former trials sank into insignificance before this unexpected catastrophe. The Empress's resolute spirit, however, was not long prostrated, but after this she seemed to cling more closely to the youngest daughter. She kept the child beside her as she stitched on her own shroud; talked of the transientness of earthly thrones; and once led her down into the vault where all the dead emperors were laid to rest.

"These predecessors of mine received the homage that now is paid to me," she said; "as they are forgotten, so I too shall one day be forgot."

Too far-sighted and too well aware of conditions at the French court to permit herself to be blinded by the brilliant destiny that awaited her child, she could not help seeing how insecure was the throne the young Princess was to occupy. She talked to Marie Antoinette of her own stormy youth, of the rough road by which she had mounted to the throne, and of the hopes and illusions she had buried. The proud sovereign wept over her mistakes and misfortunes, especially the loss of Silesia, and suddenly clasping the girl to her heart, she exclaimed, "Promise me, my child, to think of me should misfortune ever befall you!"

At other times she would take her to visit hospitals and asylums to show her the misery and suffering that existed, and to impress upon her that work and the fulfilment of duty were the only means of securing lasting happiness and peace. Marie Antoinette could neither comprehend her mother's earnestness nor the joy she took in fulfilling her oath of sovereignty; but the Empress remembered how she too had once craved only pleasure and amusement, and that only through sorrow had work grown dearer to her than all else. Her daughter's frivolity and lack of seriousness did not trouble her therefore; possibly she may not have realized it till it was too late. She could not divest herself of a feeling of partiality for this

joyous, affectionate child, whose faults were hidden under such charm.

At last the time for Marie Antoinette's departure approached. The wedding was to be solemnized at Versailles, but a series of brilliant entertainments was held at the court in Vienna and the French embassy, as a farewell to the Archduchess. In the midst of all this gaiety, and despite the brilliant life that awaited her as future Queen of France, she and those about her were oppressed with gloomy forebodings.

Doctor Gassner, a former priest, who claimed to be able to read the future, was living at that time in Vienna under the protection of the Empress; she was much interested in him, though she had little faith in his prophetic powers.

"Tell me," she said to him one day, "will my Antonia be happy?"

Gassner gazed long at the young Princess, turned pale, and made no answer. As the Empress urged him, however, he said at last: "Every shoulder has its cross to bear."

For the last few days before her departure Maria Theresa could scarcely look at her daughter without her eyes filling with tears. She had Marie Antoinette's bed brought into her own sleeping-chamber, held her in her lap, repeatedly kissed the fair hair and soft blue eyes, talked to her of her

future, and begged her not to forget Austria now that France was to be her country.

"How happy I should be if I could only keep you with me!" she said; "but I must consider the welfare of Austria and your happiness, which I trust is secured. Write to me often; your letters shall be sprinkled with my tears. I cannot write like a Madame de Sévigné, but I love you as deeply as she loved her daughter."

The formal proposal for the Archduchess's hand was presented by the French ambassador, the Marquis de Durford, April 16, 1770, and on the following day Marie Antoinette renounced all claims to the throne of Austria. The act of renunciation was signed at the royal palace in Vienna in the presence of the whole imperial family, the court, nobles, and deputies. There was an impressive silence as the Empress entered the great hall with the youthful bride. Both were deeply moved, and Maria Theresa's hand trembled so she could scarcely hold the pen to sign her name to the document.

On the twenty-first of April Marie Antoinette took her departure from the Austrian capital. Her mother seemed unable to let her go; choking with sobs she clung to her child, till the Princess finally tore herself away, hurried through the palace, and flung herself into the waiting coach, which could

scarcely make its way through the crowded streets. The whole capital seemed in mourning.

"All Vienna," says an eyewitness, "had assembled, mute with grief, to witness her departure. At last she appeared, leaning far back in the coach, her face bathed in tears, now covering her eyes with her handkerchief, now thrusting her head from the window for another glimpse of the home to which she was never to return. She made no attempt to conceal her grief nor her gratitude to the people who flocked about the coach to bid her farewell."

The little Archduchess was only fourteen years old. It is no wonder she wept, not only for what she was leaving behind her, but at the thought of the new life that was approaching.

Chapter II

Wedding Festivities

MARIE ANTOINETTE was two weeks on her journey, which led through Munich, Augsburg, and many other cities. Everywhere she was met by curious throngs, eager to see the Austrian Archduchess who was to be Dauphiness of France, and all were charmed with her loveliness. On passing the boundaries of those provinces which were under her mother's rule, she lost her self-command and wept bitterly, crying: "Alas! I shall never see my home again!"

At the French frontier, on a small island in the Rhine, a pavilion had been erected for this festive occasion, containing a salon and two small rooms, one for the Archduchess's Viennese attendants, the other for those French ladies who had been sent to meet her. Here the Princess had to be dressed anew throughout, even to her shoes and stockings. She must enter her future country clothed only in garments provided by her new attendants. Her French lady-of-honor, the Countess Noailles, approached

and made three stiff curtsies, but the warm-hearted and impulsive Marie Antoinette, paying no heed to the severe appearance of this lady, flung her arms about her neck and begged her to be her guide, comforter, and friend. The ladies who had accompanied her from home came forward to kiss her hand for the last time. Weeping, she embraced them all and sent tender messages to her mother, sisters, and friends. Then, turning to the French ladies, she said, "Forgive me! These tears are for my family and the fatherland that I am leaving. Henceforth I shall not forget that I am French."

Her reception in France baffles description. As she had been adored in Germany, so beyond the Rhine, her youth and beauty won all hearts in spite of the universal prejudice against the Hapsburgs. Her delicate loveliness and her charm of manner aroused a perfect frenzy of enthusiasm. Everywhere the road was strewn with flowers, and young girls in holiday dress offered her bouquets. The country folk crowded about the carriage to catch a glimpse of her face, shouting as with one voice, "How beautiful our Dauphiness is!" At Strasburg, which had been captured by Louis the Fourteenth, she was met by Louis the Fifteenth's envoy extraordinary, and amid the thunder of cannon and pealing of bells she made her entry into the old city. Triumphal arches had been erected in the

streets through which she was to pass. The women scattered flowers, or, dressed as shepherdesses, offered her fruit. Games were held for the amusement of the people. Fountains flowed with wine, and presents were given to the poor.

Some miles from Chalons a country priest had come out with his parishioners to greet the Princess. He had chosen the Song of Solomon as the text for his intended discourse, but when he beheld Marie Antoinette he was so overcome with surprise and emotion that he could not get beyond the first word. In vain he racked his brain, gazed up into the sky, down at his feet, then all about him again; his memory had forsaken him completely. Marie Antoinette, perceiving the poor man's difficulty, suppressed a laugh, and, taking him kindly by the hand, accepted the nosegay he held out to her, with the sweetest and prettiest of smiles. At this his presence of mind returned to him, if not his homily.

"Madame," he said admiringly, "it is not strange that my memory fails me. At the sight of such beauty even Solomon himself would have forgotten his holy song and thought no more of his fair Egyptian."

As she neared the end of her journey amid the shouts of the populace, but not without some inward trepidation, the royal family waited impatiently

at Compiègne to welcome her. Louis the Fifteenth, particularly, was most anxious to see her. As soon as she perceived the King she sprang from the coach and hastened to fling herself at his feet. Louis regarded her with more curiosity than fatherly interest, and found her even more beautiful than he had expected from the portrait that had been sent him. He raised her to her feet and embraced her, Marie Antoinette coloring under his caresses and curious glances. The Dauphin meanwhile stood beside the King even more embarrassed than his bride, and in his confusion was unable to utter a word. At last he stepped forward, and, according to the custom of the French court, silently and coldly kissed her on the right cheek.

Followed by the acclamations of the people the royal party rode to St. Denis, where the Dauphiness was presented to Louis the Fifteenth's second daughter, Louise, who had retired to a Carmelite convent at that place. At La Muette Marie Antoinette was welcomed by Clothilde and Elizabeth, her young sisters-in-law, and later that same evening they reached Versailles. On the following day, the fifteenth of May, the nuptials were to be celebrated.

At ten o'clock in the morning Marie Antoinette entered the marble hall of the palace, where she was received by the Dauphin. The King advanced

toward them, and, followed by her attendants, all repaired to the royal chapel, where the young couple, deeply moved, knelt before the altar and plighted their troth. After the ceremony the marriage contract was signed, and it was afterwards recalled by the superstitious that the bride had partly obliterated her signature by a large blot of ink.

Scarcely were the wedding ceremonies over when a frightful storm arose and extinguished the magnificent illuminations which had been prepared at Versailles. The curious throngs which had flocked thither from Paris, filling the streets and surging through the palace gardens, were forced to flee in confusion, pursued by torrents of rain, terrific flashes of lightning, and peals of thunder.

Within the palace the festivities continued in all their splendor, though the great halls also contained their storm clouds. To do honor to Maria Theresa, Louis the Fifteenth had ordered that her cousin, the Princess of Lorraine and the only relative of the Dauphiness in France, should be assigned a place immediately following the royal family. This caused serious offence among the great nobles and dukes of France; many remained away from the ball entirely, and others obstinately refused to permit the Princess of Lorraine to precede them. It required a special command from the King to force them

to obedience, and immediately after the ball they ordered their coaches and returned to Paris.

A succession of brilliant entertainments followed the wedding. The magnificent costumes, glittering jewels, splendid equipages, loaded tables, and brilliant illuminations were in grim contrast with the conditions prevailing in the capital and throughout the country, where the people were suffering from lack of bread. Nevertheless crowds flocked to Versailles every evening to admire the innumerable lights suspended in the park and the palace gardens, like stars in a clear night. For fourteen days the festivities continued without intermission. Only when the music had ceased and the lights died out was it known that the wedding celebration had cost the treasury twenty millions of francs, a sum which of course was never refunded.

"What did you think of my entertainments?" asked the King of his Minister of Finance, who is said to have replied:

"They were priceless, Your Majesty."

Paris also wished to do honor to the occasion with a public festival, and a great display of fireworks was arranged on the Place Louis Quinze. Unfortunately necessary precautions were not taken. The Bengal lights exploded, and a frightful panic ensued. There were no police present; the gendarmes, of whom there were far too few, strove in

vain to maintain order. The scaffolding which surrounded the statue of Louis the Fifteenth burst into flames. Many were trampled to death or badly injured in the press or forced into the river. Thirty-two dead bodies were found afterwards. The Dauphiness was on her way to Paris to see the fireworks when she heard of the calamity. She immediately gave all the money she had with her to be distributed among the sufferers, nor was the Dauphin less distressed over the disaster which had formed the climax of their wedding festivities. He sent his whole month's allowance to the Chief of Police in Paris for the relief of the victims, an example which was followed by many of the princes and nobles. Many regarded this unfortunate event as an omen of a yet more disastrous future.

Chapter III

Intrigue and Slander

SELDOM, indeed, has a court of such high standing as that which Marie Antoinette entered been so given over to plot and intrigue, to bitter party strife, envy, hatred, and boundless thirst for power. In the year 1770 two factions were struggling for supremacy. One, and at that time the strongest, was the party of the Prime Minister Choiseul; the other was headed by the Chancellor Maupeou and the Dauphin's governess, the Countess de Marsan. His tutor, the Duke de Vauguyon, also belonged to this party, and Maupeou had finally succeeded in winning over to his side the King's favorite, the Countess du Barry, who had never forgiven Choiseul the proud, unbending attitude he had always maintained toward her.

Earnestly as Marie Antoinette may have wished to avoid taking sides, it was quite impossible. Her mother had advised her to join Choiseul's party, and since he had been the one to arrange her marriage, a feeling of gratitude naturally prompted her

to place confidence in him. This was enough to expose her to the hatred and persecution of the rival faction, some of whom tried to weaken her popularity by malicious slanders, while others, more prudent, exerted themselves to acquire influence over her. Before she had been a month at Versailles she had become the object of a thousand intrigues.

First it was planned to get rid of her tutor, Abbé Vermond, who had accompanied her to France, and this failing, an attempt was made to offend her lady-in-waiting the Countess de Noailles by marked personal insult. No pains were spared to prejudice Louis the Fifteenth against her and to estrange her husband.

The Dauphin should naturally have been her guide and protector, but one of such weakness of character should have been in leading-strings himself. He had been a delicate child, but several years of quiet country life at the Château Bellevue, whither he had been sent with the Countess de Marsan, had restored him to health. Young Louis was scarcely fourteen years old when he became Dauphin, and but sixteen at the time of his marriage. When Marie Antoinette came to France this credulous youth was completely under the influence of his tutor, the Duke de Vauguyon, who was by no means inclined to relinquish his hold under the new regime or give up his pupil after he

became a husband. No means were too low for him to employ against the Dauphiness to gain his ends. He maintained the right of entrance at all times to the young couple's apartments, and succeeded in removing Marie Antoinette's rooms as far as possible from her husband's. He bribed servants, listened at the Dauphiness's doors, and made all sorts of accusations against her to the King. He carried his system of espionage so far that Marie Antoinette, outraged and indignant, said to him at last, "The Dauphin no longer needs a tutor nor I a spy. I beg you, therefore, let me see no more of you."

With Louis the Fifteenth lived three of his unmarried daughters — Adelaide, Victoria, and Sophie. The fourth, Louise, had retired to a convent, yet the veil that separated her from the world did not entirely conceal it from her eyes. Cardinal Fleury, who had had the honor of improving the state finances at the beginning of Louis the Fifteenth's reign, had pressed his economies so far that he had induced the King to permit his daughters to be educated in a convent like any ordinary pupils, with the result that at the age of twelve the princesses did not know the alphabet, and they were scarcely able to read when they returned to Versailles. Their brother, the Dauphin at that time, at once devoted himself to them, and with his aid they endeavored

to make up for the deficiencies of their convent education.

The eldest, Adelaide, was by far the most gifted. She had been beautiful in her youth; but seldom does beauty vanish leaving so few traces. Her manners were awkward, her voice harsh, and there was an almost masculine hardness in her nature that was far from pleasing. She had a most insatiable thirst for knowledge; played all manner of instruments, from a bugle to a jew's-harp; studied Italian, English, and the higher mathematics, and understood clock-making and the use of the turning-lathe. What is even more to her credit, since it was not usual at that time, she wrote the French language fluently and correctly, and was well versed in the history of her country. She was the King's favorite child, and would have liked to play a prominent part at court, but she lacked the necessary qualifications. Naturally imperious and tenacious of her rank, she suffered unspeakably at being treated as a nonentity. Having no power she revenged herself for slights that wounded her, by pin pricks, which she administered right and left whenever it was possible.

Princess Victoria was handsomer than her elder sister, and naturally kind and gentle. If she had only possessed the courage to follow the dictates of her heart, she would no doubt have made the life at

court far pleasanter than it was. She was indifferent, however, not to say apathetic; in fact there was but one real will among the four princesses, and that was Adelaide's.

Sophie, the youngest, was most unfortunate in her appearance, and so painfully shy that one might be with her a whole year and never hear her speak a word. The only times when this eccentric princess became affable and communicative were during thunder storms, her fear of which was so great she would forget her shyness at a flash of lightning or a peal of thunder, and cling fast to any one who happened to be near, regardless of rank or etiquette. In order to avoid looking at people and yet be able to recognize them when occasion demanded, she had acquired the habit of casting timid side glances, like a hare.

For some time after the death of their mother, Maria Leczinska, these princesses had taken her place at court. The King, completely absorbed in his favorites, saw but little of his own family. Every morning he visited Princess Adelaide's apartments by way of a secret staircase, and often drank his coffee with her there. On his arrival the Princess pulled a bell to inform Victoria of the King's presence, and she in turn gave her sister Sophie the same signal. The rooms occupied by the princesses were so large, and so many must be traversed for these

daily meetings, that although Sophie hastened with all speed, arriving breathless and almost exhausted, she often had barely time to greet her father, who never stayed long in Adelaide's salon. Every afternoon at six, all the princes and princesses made a formal visit to the King, attended by their suites and followed by pages and guards bearing tapers. Strictest etiquette was observed at these audiences, which seldom lasted more than a quarter of an hour. The three princesses were very pious, but extremely chary of putting their religion into practice, and far from amiable or attractive, as we have seen. They held themselves aloof from every one, and were awkward and embarrassed when forced to appear in public. They were ill at ease even with their father whom they saw every day, and never enjoyed the respect to which their rank entitled them. Secretly, however, they were involved in intrigues of every description, so anxious were they to preserve the appearance of a power they had never possessed. Though not yet old (Adelaide was thirty-eight when Marie Antoinette came to Versailles), they were old maids with all the usual failings of spinsters; yet in spite of their faults it was natural that the young girl should attach herself to them. On leaving home her mother had said to her: "Depend upon your aunts. They are virtuous and accomplished, and you are fortunate to have

them. I hope you will prove yourself worthy of their friendship."

After the death of the former Dauphiness the princesses had held first rank at court, and there is no doubt that Adelaide at least secretly hated the child who had displaced her. Nevertheless, the princesses welcomed the young Austrian at first with every appearance of friendship; not, it may easily be believed, from any feeling of duty toward her, and still less from any deference to her youthful charm, but most likely with a deliberate purpose. Jealous of the new star that had appeared on the horizon, they wanted to keep watch on their rival, that they might be the better able to attack her. At all events an intimacy sprang up at once between Marie Antoinette and the older ladies, the effect of which was soon apparent. The princesses cared little for court life; they lived in a little world of their own, the atmosphere of which was impregnated with scandal. Stranger as she was, Marie Antoinette allowed herself to be led into sharing their malicious gossip. Naturally gay and with a keen eye for the ludicrous in people, she was not the one to weigh her words. Believing herself quite safe in the intimacy of their little circle, she mimicked the peculiarities of even the greatest personages or laughed in their faces, while her harmless jests were repeated broadcast and deliberately misconstrued.

The Dauphiness's gaiety did not last long, however. She soon became reserved and embarrassed like her aunts, did not venture to address a word to any one of rank or importance, avoided as much as possible the duties of her position, or when forced to fulfil them appeared nervous and ill at ease. "Not content with ruling the Dauphiness herself," wrote the Austrian ambassador to Maria Theresa, "the princesses attempt to control every one in her service. They trample on her prerogatives and disregard the differences in rank that should exist between the household of the Dauphiness and their own."

Maria Theresa was alarmed at this. She wrote to her daughter:

"I am constantly informed that you do nothing except by the orders of your aunts. I have the greatest esteem for them, but they have never known how to win the respect either of the people or of their own family. And you elect to follow their example! Are my affection and counsel less worthy of consideration than theirs? I confess the matter troubles me greatly. Remember the approbation you have met with from the world and — though I do say it — the part I have played! You should listen to me, then, rather than to them when our counsels differ; for I do not agree with the worthy princesses, much as I honor them for their virtues. Again I repeat, they have never been able to make themselves popular or beloved, but by

their habit of yielding to criticism and their excessive good-nature, have become peevish and tiresome, and made themselves the centre of intrigue and slander. Can I see you following the same course and say nothing? Your silence on this point grieves me much and leaves me small hope of any change in your conduct."

Nevertheless it came. Little by little Marie Antoinette began to see that her mother was right. She could not at once break the ties her youth and isolated position had led her to form and which daily companionship had strengthened, but her confidence was shaken. Merely from force of habit she continued for a time to be guided by the princesses, but their influence gradually weakened, and after a time she yielded to them only from fear or policy. The older women did not accept the loss of their power over their niece with equanimity, and instead of criticising her secretly as before, they now began to talk about her openly. So anxious were they to find pretexts for their persecution that they complained to the King one day that the Dauphiness had presented herself before them without ceremony and in a simple morning dress. The King represented to her that such disregard of ceremony was a breach of the respect due to his daughters, adding that such simplicity would make her unpopular with the French merchants.

"My state robes," replied Marie Antoinette,

"shall be as magnificent as those of any former Dauphiness or Queen of France if Your Majesty so desires; but I beg my dear grandfather's indulgence as to my morning costumes."

The aunts employed every possible means to set the court against her, and every trifle was made food for gossip. A great ado was caused by their stirring up a quarrel between Marie Antoinette's tutor, Vermond, and Madame de Marsan, the governess of the little French princesses. Princess Adelaide declared that her nieces had received a better education than that of the Austrian archduchesses, and were far stronger physically, thanks to their religious training; while Marie Antoinette and her sisters, who had been brought up in idleness, with none but worldly interests, were thin and delicate, as well as weak in mind and body.

But Marie Antoinette was not without her faults; she was too frivolous and laughter-loving. She refused to wear bodices, and sometimes neglected to clean her teeth; she laughed and gossiped with the younger ladies of the court, ignored the protests of her bed-chamber women, soiled her clothes, and kept her room in continual disorder.

The malice of the aunts was a serious obstacle in the path of Maria Theresa's daughter, for when they found themselves forced to resign the hope of governing the Dauphiness they determined to ruin

the Queen, a purpose in which they unfortunately succeeded only too well. If their influence had been unfortunate their hatred was fatal. At the Château Bellevue, where the princesses lived during the reign of Louis the Sixteenth, all were gladly welcomed who could tell anything to the discredit of Marie Antoinette, and Adelaide's inveterate animosity pursued her to the end.

The Queen's enemies were well aware that they had an ally in the old Princess, and her house became the centre of all the intrigues. It was she who gave her niece the nickname of "the Austrian woman," and a large part of the calumnies that were circulated throughout the country to blacken Marie Antoinette's reputation had their origin at Bellevue.

For a long time before his marriage the Dauphin had been greatly influenced by his aunt Adelaide. She had cheered his solitary childhood and given him almost a mother's love; and even as King he continued to hold far too high an opinion of her wisdom and judgment. She pointed out to him the dangers of an alliance with Austria, awakened half-slumbering memories of his father, who had been slighted and treated almost as a child by Choiseul, and whispered to him an old rumor that his death had been caused by poison, hinting that the minister had had a hand in the affair. The solitary country life that Louis had led in his childhood and early

youth made him timid, awkward, and self-conscious. He had wished to remain Duke de Berry all his life, and wept when addressed for the first time as Dauphin. Without any ties with the outer world and ignored by his grandfather, he devoted himself to his favorite occupations, and was known only by the contrast of his life to that of the court at Versailles. His natural energy craving some outlet, he had a tower built in which a forge was set up, and there he spent his time. The Countess du Barry called him a "fat, ill-mannered youth"; and Count Mercy-Argenteau, the Austrian ambassador, speaks of him as returning from his work dripping with perspiration and looking as exhausted as if he had come from a field of battle. The courtiers ignored this silent, thrifty youth who dwelt without the realm of beauty; but the people called him "the chosen one," and he loved to visit the peasants on his country walks, and to talk or shake hands with them. Having two brothers more brilliant and clever than himself, he soon saw how much more favor was shown to them, which added to his natural reserve and awkwardness, and filled his heart with bitterness. At such times Aunt Adelaide had taken him to her heart and comforted him, which strengthened their intimate and confidential relations.

Louis was honest and just, and loved the people,

but he lacked the necessary firmness to inspire respect. His kindness of heart often degenerated into weakness, and his frankness into violent outbursts of passion. This Prince also had a plebeian body, — he was short and stout. His head was fine and he bore himself with dignity, but the rounding forehead and dull prominent eyes gave him an appearance of stupidity, which was enhanced by his uncertain gait and awkward manner. His voice was harsh when it did not break and become shrill, and his tangled hair stood out on all sides, for he had a habit of constantly running his hands through it. He went about in dirty clothes, with grimy hands, and was altogether lacking in those outward marks that are supposed to stamp the descendant of an ancient and noble race. He carefully avoided women, for their society annoyed him; even after his feelings had been aroused toward the lovely being who had been chosen to share his lot, it was long before his love was able to conquer his shyness. "He is not like others," Louis the Fifteenth said of him; and a courtier once dubbed him, not without reason, "the best and most uninteresting man in the kingdom."

At the wedding banquet the Dauphin had eaten with his usual voracious appetite. His grandfather could not refrain from saying to him, "Do not overload your stomach so!"

"Why not?" he asked. "I always sleep better when I have eaten well."

When they retired, Louis followed his young wife to the door of the bridal chamber. There he halted, bade her good-night with a courteous bow, and hurried away as if afraid of her.

This curious introduction to married life was told at court with various additions and much laughter, and the ridicule which attached itself to the Dauphin on his wedding night still followed Louis the Sixteenth even as husband.

The defects of his education and the unfortunate influence of Adelaide were the chief causes of his reserve toward Marie Antoinette, but at Versailles it was attributed solely to his dislike of a union with an Austrian princess. His bride, who found herself with no other occupation than to watch her husband eat and drink with a prodigious appetite, felt a sinking at her heart she did not understand. It was little consolation to be informed that the Dauphin had declared himself well pleased with her and thought her beautiful. How small a place she occupied in his thoughts may be seen from his diary for the week in which the marriage occurred.

"Sunday, May 13, 1770: Left Versailles. Dined and slept with M. de Saint Florentin at Compiègne.

"Monday, May 14: Met the Dauphiness.

"Tuesday, May 15: Dined this evening at La Muette. Slept at Versailles.

"Wednesday, May 16: My wedding. Party in the gallery. State banquet in concert-hall.

"Thursday, May 17: Opera of 'Perseus.'

"Friday, May 18: Stag-hunt. Large herd at Belle-Image. Shot one.

"Saturday, May 19: Ball in concert-hall. Illuminations."

The honeymoon ends in the diary with the remark: "Had a pain in my stomach."

Chapter IV

Employments of the Dauphiness

IN spite of the plots and intrigues that were woven about Marie Antoinette, her first experience in France was by no means unhappy. For a time the King seemed rejuvenated by the presence of the lovely, innocent child who brought a breath of purity into the tainted atmosphere of the court. Her levity and childishness were excused on account of her youth, and he overwhelmed her with gifts. On her arrival she had been presented with a *rivière* of diamonds; at the marriage he had given her a casket of jewels, and he afterwards sent her the former Dauphiness's collection of pearls and diamonds, with a collar that had belonged to Anne of Austria. All were charmed with her, — the populace, members of her household, even old courtiers; and Choiseul, who had long been interested in her, yielded completely to her fascination.

But the Austrian ambassador, Count Mercy-Argenteau, who was thoroughly acquainted with the situation at Versailles and the character of the French people, realized that all this admiration was

not without its dangers. There were too many about her whose interest it was to injure her, and the Princess's attractions were too brilliant not to be dangerous. From the first, moreover, she made no attempt to conceal her feelings or weigh her words. The very frankness that was one of her greatest charms became a source of danger; her confiding nature made her an easy victim to intrigue, her kindness of heart left her defenceless against the schemers who sought her favor. The following letter to her mother shows us how her days were spent:

"Your Majesty is so kind as to wish to know how I spend my time. I rise about half-past nine or ten, dress myself, and say my morning prayers, after which I breakfast and go to my aunts, where I usually meet the King. At eleven I have my hair dressed; at twelve any of the court who choose may enter; I rouge myself and wash my hands before all eyes, after which the gentlemen retire. The ladies remain while I make my toilette. At noon if the King is at Versailles I go with him, my husband, and the aunts to mass; otherwise I go alone with the Dauphin, but always at the same hour. After service we dine in the presence of the whole court. This does not take more than an hour and a half, for we both eat very fast. After that I go to the Dauphin, and if he is busy I return to my own room and read, write, or do needlework. I am embroidering a waistcoat for the King, which does not progress very well, but I hope with God's grace it may be

finished in a few years. At three o'clock I go again to my aunts. At four the Abbé comes, and at five my music master, who remains till six. At half-past six I go to walk if the weather is fine, when my husband often accompanies me; or else we have cards from seven to nine, at which hour, if the King is not present, the aunts come and sup with us, but when he is here we go to him. We then sit around and wait for the King, who comes at a quarter before eleven. While I am waiting I usually sit on a great sofa and sleep; and if he does not come we go to bed at eleven."

It was a life filled with trivial social duties but devoid of any serious occupation. Marie Antoinette often found so little opportunity to write to her mother that she was forced to do it during her toilette. If this was the case with so precious a duty, it is plain there must have been even less time to devote to her education, which, as we have seen, was by no means complete, and in the progress of which she took no interest. This was one of Maria Theresa's greatest anxieties. She realized too late how negligent she had been in the matter, and wished her daughter now to repair her deficiencies. She ordered that a daily record should be kept and sent to her from time to time as to the employment of the Princess's time, — a request which greatly embarrassed Marie Antoinette, whose distaste for study and love of pleasure had led her frequently

to neglect those hours reserved for instruction in the well-filled programme of the day. Not that she was absolutely idle, but in the middle of a lesson she would perhaps be seized with a desire to go for a walk when the sun was shining, or stop to chatter about something quite foreign to the subject of study, or jump up and begin to play with her lap-dog. She did not know what to say to her mother. Too honest to lie, she found it hard to tell the truth. Maria Theresa was insistent, however, and wrote with a severity that was not always merited. She said on one occasion:

"Try to store your mind with good reading; it is most important, and doubly so for you who are not well versed in other branches or even proficient in accomplishments, such as music, drawing, and painting. This is why I lay such stress upon reading, and I wish Abbé Vermond to send me a report every month as to what you have read and what your plans for study are."

This letter was too severe. It overshot the mark, and Marie Antoinette was deeply wounded. "The Empress will make people think me a perfect simpleton," she said to her tutor, when she showed it to him; but after she had become a little calmer, she added: "I will write to my mother that it is impossible for me to pursue any regular studies during the carnival, but in Lent I will begin to be industrious."

Maria Theresa was not to be appeased with promises, however. In her next letter she returns to the subject:

"I am waiting impatiently for the return post to hear of your reading and your diligence. At your age it is pardonable to be fond of amusement, but to make pleasure your sole occupation, to accomplish nothing useful or profitable, to fritter away your time in walks and visits — ah! my child, you will soon learn the emptiness of such a life and bitterly regret not having made better use of your opportunities. Your letters grow worse and worse. In ten months you should have improved greatly in your spelling. I was really mortified when I found your letters to the court ladies had passed through many hands. You must practise so that your handwriting will improve and become more uniform."

Lack of regular occupation was by no means Maria Theresa's only subject of reproof; every letter from home was full of reproaches. Marie Antoinette seemed to see the troubled, care-lined brow of the mother she so longed to meet in spite of her severity, and wept at the sight of her handwriting. Beset by enemies and surrounded with spies, alone in a profligate court, without a guardian or even a friend in whom she could confide, her thoughts turned tenderly and longingly toward home.

Not long after Marie Antoinette's arrival in France the Dauphin's brother, the Count de Provence, formed an alliance with the eldest daughter of the King of Piedmont; and the following year the Count d'Artois married her younger sister. The Dauphin and Dauphiness with the two brothers and their wives now formed a little circle of their own, taking no part in the licentious pleasures of the court and exciting no attention. The Count de Provence, who was the scholar of the family, had no sympathy with the Dauphin in any way, and never forgave his having deprived him of the throne by being born first. The Countess too would have liked her husband to be the heir, and could not understand why an Austrian Archduchess should have been chosen as Dauphiness instead of a Princess of Savoy. Marie Antoinette had little confidence in either, as may be imagined, but outwardly they were on no unfriendly footing.

The Countess d'Artois was more kind-hearted than her sister, and modest and simple in her tastes, but was regarded as a simpleton whose only use in life was to supply the house of Bourbon with heirs, and so insignificant that once when she was dangerously ill it was said at court that her funeral would be the only occasion on which she had ever attracted any attention. Handsome and courtly but pleasure-loving and dissipated, the Count d'Artois was the

leading spirit in all amusements. He spent his time at Versailles or Paris, gambling or horse-racing, at balls or the opera, and imitated as far as possible the example of his grandfather. Nevertheless the Dauphin preferred his frivolity to the cold and calculating reserve of the Count de Provence. The marks of attention which Marie Antoinette at first received she owed almost exclusively to this gay young brother-in-law, the only one of her new family whose tastes and temperament were like her own.

To vary the monotony of their life the young people began to act little plays in the court theatre, the Dauphin seated in an arm-chair, acting as audience. He yawned with ennui if the play went well, but became attentive and began to laugh and enjoy himself when the actors failed in their parts. One day in the middle of a performance loud snores informed the young artists of the impression their efforts were making on him. Furious at his lack of interest, Marie Antoinette cried angrily, "If our acting does not please you, go away! You shall have back your money."

Opportunity for revenge for this indifference to art soon offered itself. The Dauphin, who found dancing very hard work, plucked up courage one evening to attempt a quadrille, but made so many blunders he was besought not to dance with any one again till he had practised it more. He therefore

began dancing in private, and gave strict orders that no one should be admitted to the apartment on any pretext whatsoever. Breathing heavily and dripping with perspiration His Royal Highness was capering about to the strains of a violin one day, when suddenly a shrill whistle startled him, and looking up, the dancer discovered his younger brother in the gallery, doubled up with laughter. The Dauphin did not stop, but shook his fist angrily at the disrespectful Count; and when he met him later in another part of the palace he asserted his birthright by administering a sound box on the ear, a blow which the Count promptly returned. At that moment Marie Antoinette appeared on the scene and attempted to separate the combatants, but in the heat of the scuffle she received a scratch herself, whereupon the two brothers quickly made peace. This ended the Dauphin's attempts to learn the art of dancing; and the theatrical performances, having come to the ears of Marie Antoinette's tutor and the aunts, were also promptly suppressed.

Chapter V

The Countess du Barry

PRINCESS ADELAIDE was not the only one who disapproved of an alliance with the house of Hapsburg, for the marriage had generally been regarded with disfavor throughout France, and Marie Antoinette's appearance had been expected with no pleasure. At first the people were completely won over by her innocent gaiety and youthful loveliness. The Marquise de Pompadour's having yielded to the temptation of an alliance with Maria Theresa was partially forgiven; Choiseul, whose zeal had brought about the union, was less loudly blamed. But the court was not so easily appeased. All the contending factions were agreed on this point; even the old princesses and Louis's favorites objected to the marriage because it was the work of Choiseul, whom they hated.

Completely under the dominion of his favorites, Louis the Fifteenth, after the death of Madame de Pompadour, fell into the toils of the woman known to history as the Countess du Barry, and crowned his scandalous career by elevating this person to the

rank of countess and permitting her to live in the royal palace. At the time of the Dauphiness's arrival the King was a mere tool in this woman's hands, and she was one of the first obstacles Marie Antoinette encountered in her new pathway. On her first evening with the royal family she was compelled to sit publicly at the same table with her, an indignity which the youthful Princess deeply resented, though she gave no sign of anger at the time. After the meal was over one of the courtiers, thinking to entrap her, asked what she thought of the Countess du Barry. "I think she is handsome," replied Marie Antoinette, frankly — one of the first and last times she was ever known to be prudent in her remarks.

The Countess was not a malicious person; she was generous and far from vindictive, but extremely vain, and she craved those marks of homage to which she was well aware she could lay no claim. It had been her highest ambition to be received at court, and this had been attained; ministers, ambassadors, and princes visited her. From the moment of her arrival on French soil the Dauphiness found herself shoulder to shoulder with this "stupid and shameless creature," as she called the Countess. She met her at La Muette that first evening; afterwards at Compiègne, at Versailles, and on all possible occasions. She could never bring herself to

any pretence of friendliness, however, with the Countess, nor did she ever condescend to address a single word to her. The Dauphin shared this aversion for his grandfather's favorite, and concealed it as little as did his wife.

The Countess du Barry was deeply offended at the hostile attitude of the young couple; and her friends, who had nothing to hope for from the Dauphiness, did their best to malign her. With her youthful charms, aided by the support of Choiseul and Maria Theresa's counsels, they feared she might acquire an influence over the King that would prove dangerous to their own party. There was much talk of Austrian influence, and the King was besought by his favorite to dismiss Choiseul, until she at last succeeded in bringing about the downfall of the minister.

His successor, the Duke d'Aiguillon, who obeyed the Countess blindly, joined in the attacks on the Dauphiness, whose position became in truth a difficult one. Between the minister on one side and his favorite on the other, the King was forced to listen to continual complaints against Marie Antoinette, which annoyed him and changed the favor he had at first shown her to coldness.

Louis the Fifteenth was fond of his children and grandchildren, but his was purely a selfish affection. As long as they did not interfere with his pleasures

he allowed them all possible freedom; but he had a horror of domestic scenes. At length, wearied by the Countess's insinuations, he sent for the Dauphiness's lady-in-waiting instead of herself. After praising her character and her attractions he complained of her outspoken criticisms of persons and matters at his court. This was duly reported to Marie Antoinette, who hastened directly to the King. Louis's displeasure was not proof against her youthful charms; he embraced her kindly, kissed her hand, and promised not to heed the complaints of her enemies. Thus for a time their plots were frustrated. Could she but have gone to the King at every such attempt it would have been a powerful weapon in her hand, but she was completely ruled by the old princesses, who did their best to keep her away from their father; and this apparent reserve only annoyed Louis.

One day — it was the twenty-first of July, 1771 — the Austrian ambassador was summoned to the Countess du Barry's apartments, where the King desired to see him. Surprised at a request which seemed to him only a pretext for inveigling him into a visit to the favorite, he nevertheless obeyed. He was received with a great air of friendship by the Countess, who confided to him that she was greatly distressed by the calumnies that were made use of to prejudice the Dauphiness against her. "Not a day

passes," she declared, "without some proof of her contempt."

The ambassador was about to protest his ignorance of the matter, when the door opened and the King entered the room. "Hitherto," he said, "you have been the ambassador of the Empress of Austria. Now I beg you to act for the time being as mine."

Therewith he began to complain of the Dauphiness's conduct. He found her altogether charming; but young and lively as she was and married to a husband unable to control her, it was impossible for her to avoid pitfalls. She was too ready to yield to her prejudices and dislikes, which she carried so far as even to treat members of his own circle with disrespect, thus inflaming party spirit and disturbing matters at court. "Visit the Dauphiness frequently," he continued. "I empower you to say what you will from me to her. She has been influenced by bad advice, and she should not yield to it."

Count Mercy was too faithfully attached to Marie Antoinette, and saw too clearly through the network of intrigue that was being woven about her, to delay conveying to her the wishes of the King. He advised her to take a decided position one way or the other. If she wished to appear aware of the part the Countess played at court, then her dignity required her to beg the King to forbid this woman entrance to her apartments. If on the other hand

she meant to pretend not to understand the favorite's position, she must treat her as she would any other lady about the court and address a few words to her when occasion demanded.

This advice caused great commotion in the Dauphiness's circle. Marie Antoinette, who in spite of her mother's protests, was still guided by Adelaide's advice, was bitterly opposed to speaking to the Countess. "My aunts do not wish me to," she declared. The arguments of Count Mercy, added to those of her husband, however, finally induced her to yield, and it was arranged that at one of the evening receptions at court, while the ambassador engaged the Countess in conversation, the Dauphiness should approach and speak a few words to her.

The evening came, and all at first went well. Mercy approached the favorite, and Marie Antoinette began her tour of the salon. She was approaching the spot where Madame du Barry stood, when suddenly Aunt Adelaide, who had not lost sight of her for an instant, called out, "Come, child! It is time we were going." At the sound of that harsh voice the Dauphiness lost her composure, became embarrassed, and hastened away after the Princess. Thus nothing came of the projected interview. Louis was displeased, and his favorite offended.

"Your efforts are of no avail," said the King to the ambassador; "I shall be forced to come to your aid."

Count Mercy was uneasy; he feared the sovereign's anger would urge him to fatal steps. To prevent this he wrote urgently to Maria Theresa, beseeching her to take the matter into her own hands.

The Empress at this time was in the midst of negotiations with Prussia and Russia as to the Partition of Poland, a matter which her nobility of nature made it difficult for her to bring herself to countenance, and which, as she herself expressed it, "was a blot upon her reign." Urged on by Count Kaunitz and her son Joseph she wished personally to delay the affair, and a renewal of the alliance between France and Austria seemed to her the only way in which this could be accomplished. It was most important to her, therefore, that Marie Antoinette should not antagonize the party then in power. Although she had never before mentioned the Countess du Barry to her daughter, she suddenly began to overwhelm the Dauphiness with reproaches and expressed sentiments quite foreign to her character. She wrote:

"Confess that it is only embarrassment which makes you afraid to say a simple 'Good evening'; a few words about a gown or this or that trifle costs you so many

grimaces! You have allowed yourself to become so overruled that neither reason nor duty has any weight with you. I can no longer remain silent. After all that has been said to you respecting the King's wishes you presume to disobey them! What excuse can you possibly offer! It is not for you to make distinctions between Madame du Barry and any other lady who is admitted to the King's society. As his foremost subject you owe him obedience, and should set an example to the court. Neither I nor any one would demand anything of you that was low or unworthy, but a simple word — some slight consideration, not for the woman but for your grandfather, your sovereign, your benefactor. You seem afraid to talk to the King, but you do not fear to disobey and anger him."

Marie Antoinette replied to her mother:

"If Your Majesty were only here you would understand that the lady in question and her followers are by no means to be satisfied with a few occasional words; they must be continually repeated. I do not say I will never speak to her; but I will not be forced to talk to her at an appointed time and place, thus giving her and her friends an opportunity to triumph over me."

Madame du Barry did not lack audacity. At the wedding of the Count d'Artois she dined openly with the royal family, and at the King's *soirées* she even went so far as to sit beside the Dauphin. She overwhelmed the Dauphiness with attentions. "If the Empress could see her she would forgive

me," declared Marie Antoinette on one occasion; "it is too much to be borne!"

Instead of indulging her daughter in this matter, Maria Theresa continued her imperious letters, till at last, to please her mother, Marie Antoinette consented to let fall a remark that might seem addressed to the Countess. The ambassador was highly pleased at this, but his satisfaction was of short duration.

"I have spoken to her once," said Marie Antoinette, "but am firmly resolved that creature shall never hear the sound of my voice again."

It seemed an incredible sacrifice to her that she should be required to take any notice of a person she so thoroughly despised. In vain her mother and Count Mercy urged her to relinquish her hostility; in vain the Duke d'Aiguillon tried to induce her to treat the Countess with less contempt; even Princess Adelaide, who had gone over to that party, was unable to alter her niece's sentiments in this respect. To her arguments Marie Antoinette only replied: "Aunt, I advise you to keep out of Aiguillon's intrigues; he is a bad man."

Chapter VI

The State Entry into Paris

DAZZLED by the loveliness of the young Princess who had just come into the country, and at a loss where to bestow their traditional loyalty to the royal family, the people, still believing in her goodness and virtue, yielded completely to her fascination. She was the star on which all eyes were fixed. It was customary for the Dauphin and Dauphiness to make a state entry into the capital on an appointed day, but owing to intrigues this event had been put off from time to time. When, however, Louis and Marie Antoinette did at last make their appearance, in the Summer of 1773, the enthusiasm was indescribable. Along the route of the royal progress the crowds were so dense the state coach could hardly make its way through them. The streets decorated with flowers and triumphal arches gave the city a festive appearance. The air was rent with frantic shouts of applause; people flung themselves before the coach, fought for a chance to touch Marie Antoinette and kiss her hands, showered her with

blessings, and were never weary of gazing at her or listening to the sound of her voice. For each one she had a special greeting, a smile, a beaming glance from her lovely eyes. The "dames de la halle," who had come out to offer good wishes to the young couple, were invited to breakfast in the concert-hall of the Tuileries, and the palace and gardens were thronged with people.

When the Dauphiness stepped out on the balcony she was a little terrified at the vast multitude that surged below her. "Madame," said the Mayor of Paris, "I hope it will not displease your husband, but down there are two hundred thousand people in love with Your Royal Highness."

The Dauphin was not jealous. The enthusiasm of the populace and his wife's charm had had their influence on him. He forgot his shyness and replied with ease and dignity to the addresses that were made to him. Tears of joy started to Marie Antoinette's eyes. She took her husband's arm and together they walked about among the people, who pelted them with flowers and shouted till they were hoarse.

"Oh, the dear, good people!" the Dauphiness cried again and again.

Louis the Fifteenth, who had long since lost the respect and affection of his subjects, waited impatiently at Versailles for his grandchildren's return.

"I was uneasy about you, my children," he said; "you must be tired."

"It is the happiest day of my life," replied Marie Antoinette. Then out of consideration for the old King, she added, "The Parisians must love Your Majesty very much, they welcomed us so kindly."

After this triumphal entry into Paris the position of the Dauphiness improved greatly, and the relations between the young couple also became more intimate. Louis began to be attracted by his wife's beauty and vivacity, and she to value him for his worthy qualities. Yet never was there a greater irony of fate than that which united these two persons; never were two characters more directly opposite. It was like combining fire and water. Marie Antoinette was warm-hearted, full of life and animation; Louis was cold and inert and as reserved as she was outspoken. She was slender and graceful of form; he awkward and clumsy. Even his kindness did not greatly appeal to Marie Antoinette, for it was of a rough, uncouth sort, without any of the sentiment or delicacy she loved. In this dull prince who took no pleasure in anything but his workshop, where he would shut himself up for hours together with his favorite companion, a blacksmith named Gamain, she looked in vain for the husband of whom she had dreamed — the future King of France. The Dauphin's indifference to

his personal appearance also caused a feeling of disgust in his young wife; on one occasion she reproached him bitterly for being so careless in his dress. Louis was at first offended, then began to weep, and they made their peace.

"Do you love me?" he asked her one day.

"Yes," she replied, "I do truly love you; that you must never doubt. But I respect you even more." Her naive frankness amused the Dauphin, and from that time he began to be more careful.

The Dauphiness's position at court also became more agreeable. After a few violent outbursts the old princesses apparently ceased their persecutions, and other members of the royal family took pains to please the future Queen. Even the Countess du Barry ceased her intrigues and complaints, for she realized, and others did not fail to remind her, that the King was old, and it was to her interest to be on good terms with the Dauphin and Dauphiness.

In April, 1774, the King was seized with the smallpox. Informed by the physicians that it was time to consider a future life, his conscience awoke, and the Countess du Barry was ordered to leave the royal palace. The news of his condition was received in Paris with an indifference bordering on joy, while the courtiers knew not whether to adhere to the sinking sun or attach themselves to the one that was rising. When it was learned that death was imminent

they vanished from Versailles like leaves before a storm, while the populace, on the contrary, flocked to the palace to verify the reports.

Louis had a great fear of death, and suffered horribly. At one time he would cover his face and thrust away the extended cross, shrieking that he was unworthy of Christ's mercy; at another, casting piteous glances to heaven, he would clasp it to his heart, covering it with tears and kisses.

The infection was so terrible that even the physicians were reluctant to enter the sick chamber. Many caught the disease merely by passing through the gallery without, and one courtier succumbed from opening the door for a moment to glance at the King. It was almost impossible to induce any servants to attend the dying man.

By the King's desire the Dauphin and Dauphiness left the palace, and his daughters and a few faithful attendants were the only ones present at his death-bed. Forsaken by all his friends and courtiers, Princesses Adelaide and Louise never left his side. In spite of the certainty of being infected by the disease, they performed all the repulsive duties of the sick-room, sustained the dying monarch with their prayers, and remained at their post till the end, resisting the entreaties of the physicians and even of their father himself.

On the tenth of May, 1774, he breathed his last.

A lighted candle which had been placed in a window of the palace to show that the King still lived was extinguished, and those waiting without knew that Louis the Fifteenth was dead.

The only officials remaining in the palace were the master of ceremonies and those courtiers whose duties required them to see that the earthly remains of their sovereign were consigned to the grave. The body was hastily rolled in a sheet and thrown into a triple coffin of oak, which was placed on a wagon and conveyed in the dead of night to the royal vaults at St. Denis, greeted with jeers and drinking songs by some belated revellers from the public-house.

"Louis the Fifteenth," said a scoffer, "paid with paper money when he was born; brought us war in his prime, famine when he was old, and the pest when he died."

Chapter VII

Court Etiquette

NO King of France was ever less aspiring than the well-meaning youth with smoke-grimed hands who ascended the throne on the death of Louis the Fifteenth, and who looked upon his sovereignty as a burden to be borne with Christian resignation.

After the old King had breathed his last, the royal family were gathered in the chapel praying for the soul of the deceased, when a terrible storm arose. The rain beat against the windows, gusts of wind extinguished the wax tapers, and the thunder drowned the voices of the priests. The Countess de Noailles and Abbé Vermond had been the first to greet the Dauphin and Dauphiness as King and Queen of France. The young couple burst into tears. "God help us!" they cried, falling on their knees, "we are too young to reign!"

It was a cry from the heart and not without reason, for Louis, who was barely twenty years old, had been carefully excluded from any share in the government, while Marie Antoinette, then in her

nineteenth year, had neither desire nor capacity for affairs of state. The court was torn by rival factions, the finances were in disorder, and respect for the King's authority was weakened.

After the death of Louis the young couple took up their residence temporarily at La Muette, a small château near Boulogne, the gates of which were besieged from earliest dawn to sundown by enthusiastic throngs shouting, "Long live the King!" Much was hoped for from the new sovereign, who was known to be earnest, well informed, and, despite his awkward manner, truly kind and benevolent; nor was less expected of the beautiful and gracious young Queen. The intrigues that had followed Louis the Fifteenth even to his death-bed were already busy about the foot of his grandson's throne; even before the old King's body was borne away the struggle for honors and position had begun.

The most urgent demand of the people was promptly complied with — the Countess du Barry was banished from court; her brother, the ringleader in all her schemes, was forced to flee to England. But this was not enough to satisfy the impetuosity of the French; they insisted on having all who had been in power expelled from the palace within twenty-four hours. "I must confess the enthusiasm of the French causes me some uneasiness," Marie Antoinette wrote to her mother during

these first days of sovereignty. "It is impossible to satisfy every one in a country where the people are so impatient."

Maria Theresa shared her doubts. "I fear their happy days are over," she said to her Minister when she informed him of her daughter's accession to the throne. To the King and Queen she wrote: "You are both too young, my dear children, and your burden is a heavy one. I am anxious for you — oh, so anxious!"

The Empress had permitted her daughter to marry the Dauphin of France, hoping to promote her own plans; but she could scarcely have chosen an instrument less fit for her purpose. Of all her daughters Marie Antoinette was least interested in political affairs.

Princess Adelaide had taken the disease at her father's sick-bed, but she did not permit her illness to interfere with her schemes. At the outset of her nephew's reign she made it plain that she controlled the youthful sovereign and intended to have a voice in his choice of a Minister. She showed him the testament his father had left for his guidance in matters of policy, and while Marie Antoinette was taking her walks held secret meetings to discuss the list of names the former Dauphin had approved as counsellors to his successor.

By Adelaide's desire the Marquis de Maurepas

was made leader of the Privy Council, a choice little to the liking of Marie Antoinette. The latter was partly to blame for this, having permitted the aunts to live under the same roof with her and the King, although it had previously been agreed that they should be separated for a time. She had not the strength of mind to oppose Adelaide, and her one thought seems to have been to get rid of D'Aiguillon, whom she detested and called "that hateful man."

Her personal choice would have been Choiseul, who was devoted to her and had arranged her marriage, but she could not remove the King's prejudice against him. All she could obtain was permission for him to visit her at court. The young Queen greeted him most cordially. "I am charmed to see you again, Monsieur Choiseul," she said, "and would have been very glad could I have brought about your return to us. It is to you I owe my good fortune, and it is only right that you should be witness of it."

But Louis was not so amiable. He had not forgotten the false and evil tales with which his childhood had been poisoned. "How stout you have grown, Monsieur Choiseul!" he said; "and you are getting bald!" That was the only remark he addressed to the former Prime Minister. The Duke himself had had no illusions in regard to

this visit; before the audience took place he had ordered his horse saddled, ready to return home.

The King's household consisted of fourteen hundred officials, while the Queen had four hundred and fifty, all of whom bore high-sounding, absurd titles. The life of Louis and Marie Antoinette was almost that of prisoners, the discipline that governed the palace being like that of a barracks. This rigid supervision, a relic of olden days, annoyed Marie Antoinette more than anything else during the early part of her reign. Etiquette pursued her everywhere, at every hour of the day; it hampered her freedom, destroyed her pleasure, interfered with her friendships. Sick or well, in public or in private, she was bound down by it. Every detail of her life, even to the style of her dress and the shape of a loop of ribbon, was regulated by the strictest laws. One of these numerous rules compelled the Queen to dine with the King publicly at noon, attended only by her women. Another required two ladies in court dress to remain constantly in attendance on her.

It was the duty of the lady-of-honor and the lady-in-waiting to dress the Queen, assisted by a woman of the bed-chamber and two tire-women. This ceremony was also regulated by strict rules: the lady-in-waiting drew Her Majesty's petticoat over

her head and handed her her dress; the lady-of-honor poured water into a basin for her to wash her hands, and put on her linen. Disrobing was a matter of equal ceremony: at night the Queen was obliged to wear a corset trimmed with lace and a large white kerchief. From the time she drank her morning chocolate, all might enter her bed-chamber whether she was up or still in bed. The levee proper, however, did not take place till noon, when princes and court officials came to pay their respects. In their presence the Queen made her toilette.

Nothing was ever handed directly to her. Whatever she wanted — a handkerchief or a glass of water — was placed on a salver and passed through many hands before it finally reached her, so that the Queen though surrounded by attendants was often very badly served. An anecdote told by her lady of the bed-chamber in her memoirs gives an idea of the intolerable tyranny of court etiquette.

One winter night Marie Antoinette was waiting for her night-robe to be put on. The lady of the bed-chamber held it in her hands ready to draw it over the Queen's head, when the lady-in-waiting entered, removed her gloves, and took the garment. Just then there came a knock at the door and the Duchess of Orléans was admitted. She too drew off her gloves and approached to receive the Queen's

night-robe. Etiquette forbade her to take it from the lady-in-waiting, who handed it back to the bed-chamber woman, who was about to pass it on, when again there was a knock at the door; this time it was the Countess of Provence. The Duchess of Orléans again gave it back to the bed-chamber woman, who handed it to the Queen's sister-in-law. All this time Marie Antoinette had stood there waiting, shivering and almost frozen, till the Countess of Provence seeing her plight drew the night-robe over her head without waiting to remove her gloves.

Nor was the burden of etiquette in any way lightened by the Countess de Noailles, her mistress of ceremonies, a virtuous, pious, and most worthy person, but without the slightest attractions either of person or disposition. She had been lady-of-honor to Maria Leczinska, the former Queen of France, and according to the laws of etiquette was appointed to fill the same position in Marie Antoinette's household. She had reduced court ceremonial almost to a science; the wife of Louis the Fifteenth had been guided entirely by her directions. The more Maria Leczinska had thanked God in her inmost heart for elevating her to so lofty a position, the less had she cared to be reminded of her birth. The Polish princess therefore had laid great stress on all outward tokens of respect, and wished them strictly observed.

It was quite different with the wife of her grandson. When the mistress of ceremonies wearied her beyond endurance with points of etiquette she would reply hotly, "Have it your own way, Madame! But do not expect a Queen who was born an archduchess of Austria to attach the same importance to such matters as a simple Polish princess who was made Queen of France."

Much as Marie Antoinette may have despised all this ceremony, it was dangerous for her to do away with it, as she did; for the veil of secrecy it cast about royalty added much to the glamour necessary for its maintenance at that time. The Countess should have made this plain to the young Queen, and shown her the danger of suddenly introducing new customs into an old court; instead of which she wearied her with continual reproofs: Her Majesty should have done this way or that; she had smiled at the wrong moment or nodded when she should have curtsied. This perpetual interference had annoyed Marie Antoinette even as Dauphiness; as Queen she found it intolerable.

One day when she was riding a donkey the animal threw her. The terrified courtiers hastened to her assistance, but she waved them away and lay in the grass laughing. "Send for Madame Etiquette!" she cried. "She can tell us how a Queen of France should behave when thrown from a donkey!"

From that time the lady-of-honor was known by no other name at court than "Madame Etiquette."

Both Maria Theresa and Louis the Sixteenth encouraged Marie Antoinette in shaking off the yoke of ceremony she found so irksome, and to their advice was added that of her tutor, the Abbé Vermond. This was a person of no small importance at court, owing to the influence he had quietly but surely obtained over the Queen. Of humble birth, his vanity had been aroused and flattered by Maria Theresa's having admitted him to her family circle at their evening parties, and he always retained the greatest admiration for the Empress and the unpretentious customs of the Austrian court. He was altogether an original character, despising outward marks of honor, and preferring to appear only as Marie Antoinette's friend and counsellor. He treated the loftiest personages as equals, almost indeed as inferiors, often receiving ministers or bishops seated in his bath. Vermond was both hated and feared at Versailles. When Louis the Sixteenth became King it was hoped he would be dismissed, for the new sovereign could not endure his wife's tutor, and never noticed him in any way. But the Abbé remained, nor was the Queen's faith in him ever shaken for a moment. She referred everything to him; it is probable he often persuaded

her into taking steps the consequences of which she could not foresee. He lost no opportunity of encouraging her in her rebellion against court etiquette. If it chanced that she was dissuaded from taking a morning walk or urged not to appear in a dress that did not conform to the prescribed rule, he would demand scornfully: "Would you have the Queen perpetually encased in a suit of armor? Is she never to venture out without a regiment of soldiers following after her, like a field-marshal setting out to conquer a fortress? Let her wear her simple gowns and breathe the fresh air without all this antiquated foolery! It has always been her custom, as it was that of the Empress Maria Theresa."

Thus he would recall to Marie Antoinette the freedom and simplicity of her mother's court, making sport of the etiquette of the Bourbons, oblivious of the fact that the Queen's dignity required her adherence to the old customs and usages of the French court.

Chapter VIII

The Queen's Frivolity

LOUIS and Marie Antoinette had no sooner ascended the throne than they began to encounter opposition and jealousy in their own family. The Counts and Countesses of Provence and of Artois refused to wait upon the King and Queen every morning, as had been their custom with the former sovereign, and Louis, who was kindness itself, did not require his brothers to address him as "Your Majesty." On public occasions when the royal family were together a stranger would have found it difficult to tell which was the sovereign. The Count d'Artois, in particular, was almost offensively familiar. He jostled his oldest brother, trod on his feet, and contradicted him constantly. The Count de Provence was more prudent, thrusting himself less into the foreground; but he was less candid and soon became one of Marie Antoinette's secret enemies.

As for Princess Adelaide, we have seen how bitter she was against the young Queen. Her sister Louise, who kept an eye on court doings from her

convent, was little less so, while the Count de Provence lost no opportunity of injuring his sister-in-law. Marie Antoinette, on her part, made it quite clear to the two princesses of Savoy that she fully realized her two-fold superiority as Archduchess of Austria and Queen of France. They were not slow to retaliate, and bitter quarrels and dissensions arose. Naturally imprudent and fond of admiration, the Queen laid herself more open to criticism than her adversaries, and, thanks to the ceaseless efforts of her aunts and sisters-in-law, a network of calumny soon enveloped her.

The last year of Louis the Fifteenth's reign was an unhappy one for Marie Antoinette. Shut out from the amusements of the court by her abhorrence of the King's favorite, condemned to the society of the morose, ill-humored old princesses and Mme. de Noailles with her eternal sermons, her natural vivacity and love of pleasure were completely suppressed. Now, elevated suddenly to freedom and power at so early an age, her many-sided nature seemed to undergo a change; qualities hitherto dormant sprang to life. Reaction from the boredom and restraint of court etiquette showed itself in an inordinate thirst for pleasure, and unfortunately there were only too many at court who shared her tastes.

Marie Antoinette loved Paris, and the theatre

was one of her greatest delights. Her frequent visits to the capital pleased the Parisians at first, but when she began to attend private and masked balls it was looked upon as unbecoming the dignity of a queen. It is true these so-called opera-balls were frequented by good society, and the King willingly permitted her to attend them, though he never was known to accompany her save on one occasion. She was usually escorted by her brother-in-law; now in the garb of an Amazon, now in a shabby domino, she danced all night, and seldom returned to Versailles before nine o'clock the next morning.

Naturally there was no lack of malicious gossip and slander. One evening a masker had the audacity to approach and accuse the Queen of neglecting her conjugal duty. "A good wife," he declared, "should stay at home with her husband and not run about alone to balls."

These scandalous reports at last reached the ears of the King, who showered passionate reproaches upon his wife. It is probable that Marie Antoinette was not half so light-minded as she is represented. Many of these stories were false, others wilfully exaggerated; but the abandon with which she gave herself up to pleasure, while not so bad in itself as it was made to appear, placed a powerful weapon in the hands of her enemies.

Strange to say, she never seemed aware of the gossip to which she was giving rise, or to suspect that she was furnishing the canvas upon which tattlers and scandal-mongers were to paint a false picture of her life. She looked upon the opera-balls as a most innocent diversion, quite unconscious of the injury her visits to them did her, or that her freedom of manner offended public sentiment. If the Queen herself was unmindful of her dignity it was only natural that others should begin to disregard it.

We have already seen the offence she had given as Dauphiness by her love of ridicule. Some days after the burial of their grandfather the young sovereigns received a visit of condolence from some of the highest nobles and dignitaries in the kingdom, upon which occasion Marie Antoinette created a host of enemies by laughing at the antiquated costumes of some of the elderly dames. Deeply offended at this violation of all decorum, these ladies returned to their castles or convents full of bitterness against her, and vowing never to set foot in her court again. This occurrence, together with her openly expressed preference for young people, and a remark that she did not see why any one over thirty should wish to appear at court, gave rise to the vulgar ditties that were circulated against her.

Ill at ease on her new throne and wearied by the

long audiences required of her, she neglected her duties on state occasions, forgot to notice people whose rank or standing entitled them to her consideration, and soon had the more serious-minded part of the court so set against her that she was obliged to form a circle of her own. Even here, however, she was too outspoken and imprudent. She made sport of those who were no longer young and handsome, surrounded herself with persons whose reputations were not always of the best, and adopted as her adviser, not the King, whose peculiarities she often ridiculed, but the Count d'Artois, who followed her about like a shadow on all occasions.

Her adversaries found a powerful ally in the Countess de Marsan, the former governess of the King and of his sisters, whose opinions, by virtue of the respect she enjoyed and the position she long had occupied, carried much weight. This lady misinterpreted her every action, distrusted and traduced her on all possible occasions, while the Queen revenged herself by ridicule and witticisms, forgetting the Countess's position and her power at court.

Chapter IX

The Follies of Fashion

IT will be seen from the foregoing that Marie Antoinette lacked many of the qualities desirable in a queen; but as far as personal attractions were concerned she was eminently fitted for her position, not only as Queen of France, but also as queen of the realm of beauty. As Dauphiness she was charming rather than beautiful, and the Countess du Barry spitefully called her "the little red-head" at their first meeting. Yet she enchanted others with the sweetness of her smile, her graceful figure, lovely profile, and the large, expressive eyes that could laugh so easily and as quickly flash with scorn or anger.

During the four years that elapsed between her arrival in France and the death of Louis the Fifteenth she developed surprisingly, until at the time of her accession to the throne she combined the beauty of the woman with the majestic bearing of the sovereign. Even had she belonged to the lowest ranks of society her loveliness would have excited universal

admiration; and it is easy to understand the enthusiasm excited by her as the wife of a king and the daughter of an empress. Whenever she entered a room she was greeted with a general murmur of admiration. At the theatre every opera-glass was levelled at her instantly; in men she inspired a devotion bordering on infatuation.

Mme. Vigée le Brun, who first painted her portrait (1779), thus describes her appearance at that time:

"She was tall and well proportioned, her hands and feet were small and exquisitely formed. No woman in France had a more imposing bearing. She carried her head high, with a dignity that instantly stamped her as the sovereign without lessening in any degree her kindness of manner. At my first audience with the Queen she permitted me to speak of my impressions and to observe how much her way of carrying her head enhanced the nobility of her appearance. To which she replied laughingly, 'If I were not Queen of France people would call me bold, would they not?'"

The Summer after the death of Louis the Fifteenth was spent by the young couple at the chateaux of Choisy, La Muette, Marly, and Compiègne, and not until the beginning of September did the court return to Versailles. The apartments that had been occupied by Louis the Sixteenth as Dauphin were given over to the Count de Provence, while the

room in which Louis the Fifteenth had breathed his last served as the new King's bed-chamber until the sixth of October, 1789. The Queen retained the apartments she had occupied as Dauphiness, the abode also of former queens of France, and which Imbert de Saint-Amand has described in his "Women of Versailles." He says:

"Ascending the marble staircase, we come to a door on the first floor which leads to the Queen's salon, an apartment reserved for her bodyguard. In the adjoining room, called variously 'the Queen's ante-chamber' and 'the great dining-hall,' the King dines publicly with his wife. For the Queen this is merely a form; she takes her dinner later in her private apartments. The King, on the contrary, eats with a prodigious appetite.

"In this same room the state banquets are held, at which only princes on their wedding-day may be present. The sovereign is served on magnificent plates and dishes. Ladies of the highest rank are in attendance but do not eat. Only princesses and duchesses sit at the table on chairs or tabourets. All the rest stand.

"In the next apartment the Queen holds her public levees, seated on a dais under a canopy. Adjoining this is the Queen's bed-chamber, within whose walls fifteen princes and princesses of the blood first saw the light of day, two queens and two dauphinesses died, and all Marie Antoinette's children were born. In the rear of this room is an almost invisible door which opens into a small passage called the King's walk, leading to the council-chamber

and Louis the Sixteenth's bed-chamber. It was through this that Marie Antoinette fled half-dressed from her would-be murderers on the morning of October 6, 1789.

"Last of all comes the magnificent Hall of Peace which opens into the Gallery of Mirrors."

The Queen spent little time in these state apartments, preferring four modest, poorly lighted little rooms which she had had fitted up expressly for her own use, consisting of a salon and two libraries, together with an anteroom that communicated with her bed-chamber.

Before her accession to the throne Marie Antoinette was comparatively simple in her dress, and was accustomed to make her morning visits in those light gowns that so offended the ceremonious old princesses. A milliner, the famous Mlle. Bertin, completely altered the Queen's taste in this respect, and was responsible for the extravagance she afterwards displayed. The Duchess de Chartres, subsequently Dúchess of Orléans, recommended this woman to Marie Antoinette, who took a great fancy to her. Being a bourgeoise, and the first of her class that had ever been given the *entrée* to the King's palace, it was several months after their first meeting before her royal patroness dared to receive her anywhere but in her own closet. Naturally ambitious and designing, Mlle. Bertin soon acquired considerable influence over the Queen, with whom

she appeared on the most intimate terms, and to whom she dictated on all matters of fashion.

"Mlle. Bertin is my Minister of Dress," declared Marie Antoinette; "she keeps intriguers away from me," — a remark which made the milliner so conceited she fancied her position quite as important as that of a king's councillor.

After Mlle. Bertin became her mistress of the wardrobe the Queen abandoned the old custom requiring her to make her toilette before all eyes. Those who presented themselves in her bed-chamber now merely saluted the sovereign and retired, and Mlle. Bertin was henceforth the only one admitted to her private apartments to assist her to dress. After this she returned to the regular state boudoir, whither all might repair who wished to address petitions to her while the court hairdresser was arranging her coiffure.

It was Mlle. Bertin who originated the remarkable fashion of dressing the hair that was in vogue at that period. Huge structures of gauze, flowers, and feathers were worn, combined with puffs, curls, and braids. The strangest articles were seen on the heads of ladies. Coiffures often thirty or forty inches high were arranged to represent botanical gardens, allegories, landscapes, and every conceivable thing. In one would be seen a meadow with lambs, a stag, and a brook; another would represent

the five divisions of the globe with sun, moon, and stars; a third bore a parasol which opened and shut according to the sunshine or shade; while a fourth displayed a diamond bird fluttering with outspread wings over a blooming rose. Special designs were invented for all occasions. The Duchess de Chartres appeared once at a court festival wearing a battleship with masts and silken sails; another evening an allegorical figure of her little son Louis Philippe asleep on the knees of his nurse. The court hairdresser, Leonard, gave himself the title of "*Académicien de coiffures et de modes.*" In order to secure the services of this artist ladies were often forced to have their hair dressed early in the morning, or even the night before an event, and sit all night in a chair that the imposing structure might not be injured.

Mlle. Bertin did not do things by halves. Every month, sometimes every week, she made Leonard heighten the coiffure. One morning when Marie Antoinette entered her boudoir, a servant appeared bearing a three-legged stool. "What is that for?" she asked her bedchamber woman. Whereupon the hairdresser approached and, bowing low, informed Her Majesty that without a stool it would be impossible for him to put the finishing touches on her coiffure.

The Queen sent her mother a portrait of herself

in a towering head-dress with feathers half a yard long. Maria Theresa promptly returned it with the following words: "My daughter! there must be some mistake. I have received a portrait, not of the Queen of France, but of some actress. I send it back, therefore, hoping to obtain the right one." Her mother's criticism made little impression on the youthful sovereign, who looked upon it merely as an expression of ill-humor, due to the failing health of the Empress.

The fashionable colors were as striking and extravagant as the coiffures. One day the Queen appeared in a bright yellow costume. "That is the color of the Queen's hair," remarked the Count de Provence. The color was at once adopted at court. Locks of Marie Antoinette's hair were sent to the silk factories at Lyons, that the color might be exactly reproduced in silks and ribbons.

Marie Antoinette flung herself heart and soul into all these follies of fashion. At times she could talk or think of nothing but dress. The Countess de la Marck, who describes the court of France at that period, says of her: "The Queen is seen constantly at the opera or theatre, runs into debt, flies from one folly to another, decks herself out with ribbons and feathers, and makes sport of everything."

Her example was most injurious to all classes; all the women imitated her; the same flowers, the

same ribbons, the same ornaments must be worn, regardless of expense. Husbands and fathers complained bitterly; many were plunged into debt. Strife and dissension broke out in families that had hitherto lived in perfect accord. Husbands and wives were separated, and all the blame was heaped upon Marie Antoinette, who was accused of having ruined her sex by her bad example.

Chapter X

The Queen's Fickleness

ALL through her life Marie Antoinette had a weakness for forming friendships with beautiful women. But easily as she was captivated by beauty or wit, the attraction was never of long duration, for, continually craving new emotions, her volatile affections flitted from one to another. Up to the time of her intimacy with the Countess de Polignac she was regarded, and not without reason, as incapable of true friendship. Whenever a new star appeared on her horizon she would cast aside, without the least effort, one whom but the day before she had overwhelmed with attention and marks of favor.

As Dauphiness, Marie Antoinette had been attracted for a short time by the Duchess de Picquigny, the youngest lady at court, whose fondness for mimicking the peculiarities of older people encouraged in the Dauphiness that love of ridicule which afterwards made for her so many enemies. She soon tired of this fancy, however, and transferred her affections to Mme. de Saint-Mégrin, who

was succeeded by the lady-in-waiting Mme. de Cossé and the Marquise de Langeac.

A year before the death of Louis the Fifteenth a young actress, Mlle. Raucour, had taken all France by storm, and Marie Antoinette became deeply interested in her, both for her charms and for her remarkable talent. She invited her to Versailles, paid her debts, and loaded her with favors. The tears and reproaches of the former favorite, Mme. de Langeac, who found herself thus superseded, only served to hasten her downfall, while all distinctions of rank between the Dauphiness and the priestess of Thalia seemed lost sight of.

It was at one of the Countess de Noaille's receptions that the Princess de Lamballe was presented to the future Queen, who no sooner beheld this lovely creature than all her former friendships were forgotten. Marie Thérèse Louise de Savoy-Carignan, daughter of Prince Louis Victor of Carignan and Princess Christine Henriette of Hesse-Rheinfeldt-Rothenburg, was born in Turin, September 8, 1749. She came to France at the age of seventeen to marry the Prince de Lamballe, only son of the Duke de Penthièvre, a man universally respected for his benevolence and nobility of character. The marriage proved a short and unhappy one. Misled by his brother-in-law, the Duke de Chartres, the Prince plunged into a life of excess

and died a year after the wedding. His widow became one of the most attractive figures at the French court. "Spring in Ermine," and "Roses underneath the Snow," were some of the descriptions applied to her. No shadow ever rested on the reputation of the Princess de Lamballe. Upon the death of her husband she retired for a time to a convent, but afterwards made her home with her father-in-law, who loved her as his own child.

Her beauty excited universal admiration when she first appeared at Versailles, and Louis the Fifteenth was so charmed with her that the Countess du Barry and her friends began to fear that the Princess de Lamballe might become Queen of France and put an end to the favorite's reign. She showed no desire to please the old King, however. The trials of her youth had saddened her, and she cared little for the gaieties of court life. Her misfortunes only made her the more interesting in the eyes of the Dauphiness. Everything conspired to draw them together — youth, beauty, pride of birth; and Marie Antoinette's accession to the throne only seemed to strengthen the bond between them. Friendship with the Princess was no light affair. All the passionate tenderness her husband had scorned, and which had since lain dormant beneath her cold exterior, she lavished upon the young Austrian.

Even their differences of disposition proved a source of attraction ; for the Queen's high spirits enlivened the Princess's sadness, while her placidity served as a check on the other's levity. When she came to the throne Marie Antoinette was anxious to install her favorite permanently at court, but as the Princess's rank debarred her from accepting a position as lady-of-honor, the only one suitable was that of Lady Superintendent. This had been held under the former Queen by the Princess de Clermont, daughter of the Duke de Bourbon ; but after the death of Maria Leczinska the office was abolished. Marie Antoinette's attempt to revive it on behalf of a foreign princess aroused great indignation. Even the King, by the advice of his minister Turgot, strongly opposed it. By her ceaseless entreaties, however, the Queen induced him to yield, and the appointment was made in September, 1775.

The appearance of the Princess de Lamballe in that position roused a storm of protest. Many of the court ladies refused to remain under the new superintendent, and the Countess de Noailles, who had neither forgotten nor forgiven the Queen's nickname for her, —" Madame Etiquette," — asked to be relieved of her duties, and departed from Versailles full of bitterness against her royal mistress, which soon grew into hatred.

The Princess de Lamballe was most high-minded

PRINCESS DE LAMBALLE

and honorable, but somewhat narrow; deeply as one must respect the loyalty that led her to martyrdom, it cannot be denied that she had her failings. She induced the Queen to place her brother, the Prince of Carignan, at the head of a regiment of infantry, with an income of thirty thousand francs, while she herself drew an annual salary of one hundred and fifty thousand francs. By these and other exactions she caused much ill feeling, though she seldom used her influence for her own advantage. The greater part of her income was given to the poor, for misery never appealed to her in vain. Marie Antoinette used to say, "How fortunate the poor are to have you to befriend them! It is impossible for me to refuse you anything. Sometimes I think it is only for their sake that you remain with me!"

The conscientious Princess performed her duties at court with the greatest zeal, and the more opposition she met with the more firmly she clung to her privileges. Her royal friend, who hated all questions of ceremony, had left her rights and duties wholly undefined, which gave rise to perpetual disagreements between the superintendent and the ladies of the court. Every day fresh dissensions occurred; general discontent and confusion prevailed. The Queen was forced to listen to continual complaints and settle disputes; this annoyed her, and she blamed her friend. Gradually her affection cooled,

and without entirely dropping the Princess she turned to the quest of new friendships.

Of these only one is deserving of mention, namely, the Princess de Guéméné, niece of the Countess de Marsan. This lady and her husband led an exceedingly gay and frivolous life, and the Queen was fond of spending her evenings with them. Their circle consisted solely of young people, who often behaved with such impropriety as to give general offence. Play ran high, and the general tone of these gatherings was so questionable that on one occasion some of the ladies present were forced to leave. The Queen remained, however, and was a constant visitor at Mme. de Guéméné's, where she found herself highly entertained. It was more a thirst for pleasure than fondness for her hostess that attracted her, since at this time her whole affections had become centred upon the Countess de Polignac, an intimacy as injurious to the Queen as it was advantageous to the Countess and her family.

Among the changes in the Queen's household incident to the Princess de Lamballe's instalment at court and the retirement of Mme. de Noailles, was the appointment of Countess Diane de Polignac as court reader. Marie Antoinette was reserved at first with this lady, whom she rightly regarded as self-seeking and coquettish. Nevertheless, Diane succeeded in obtaining admittance to the Queen's

little evening receptions, and it was she who presented her sister-in-law to the sovereign.

Gabrielle Yolande Claudine Martine Polastron was born in 1749 and married in 1767 to Count Jules de Polignac, an impoverished nobleman from Auvergne. Until the time of her appearance at Versailles she had led a quiet, retired life in the country, with little thought of ever becoming a parasite in the palace of a king. Marie Antoinette at once singled out the Countess de Polignac for most distinguished marks of favor, and on learning that it was lack of means that had kept her so long from appearing at court, proceeded without delay to provide her and her husband with a residence at Versailles and a suitable income. To the Queen her poverty was but an added attraction — a burden of fate which it was her duty to relieve. In less than a year all was changed. The Countess and her husband were loaded with favors of every sort; such enormous sums were expended on them that the people began at last to murmur at the endless demands of the Polignac family.

The Countess, while by no means learned or clever, was a woman of the world; she possessed, behind a pleasing, tactful manner and a calmness that never deserted her even in the most difficult situations, far more ambition and audacity than one would have given her credit for. Naturally quiet,

not to say indolent, and accustomed to the peace and freedom of a country life among her friends, Marie Antoinette's extravagant and unbounded affection often wearied her; perhaps she would have relinquished sooner the position forced upon her of Queen's favorite, had it not proved so lucrative to herself and to the circle which quickly gathered about her, eager to reap advantage from her influence over the Queen.

This new intimacy at first made no change in Marie Antoinette's relations with the Princess de Lamballe. Possibly the latter hoped that this sudden attachment would be as short-lived as so many former friendships of the Queen's had proved. But among the old and noble families it roused endless jealousies; and when Mme. de Lamballe discovered that the Queen's enemies were using this intimacy as a weapon against her, she considered it her duty to warn her of the danger to which she was exposing herself.

This was enough to make the Countess de Polignac her avowed enemy. Against such a rival, aided by all the charm of novelty as well as the influence of her family and friends, the Princess could do little at a court where, in spite of her high birth, she was looked upon as stupid and insignificant.

Marie Antoinette at first endeavored to make

peace between her two friends; but, gradually wearying of Mme. de Lamballe, she began unconsciously to shun her society. The Polignacs were not slow to avail themselves of this, and it was not long before the former favorite was entirely neglected. Early trained to adversity, the Princess was too proud to show what she suffered; nor could she at once withdraw from the duties imposed upon her by her high position. She appeared at court more and more rarely, and at length retired completely, returning to the home of her father-in-law, whose simple life she shared till danger called her once more to the side of her sovereign. Unappreciated in days of prosperity, she alone remained true to Marie Antoinette when all others had deserted her. She loved more than she was beloved, and gave far more than she received.

Chapter XI

Trianon

AS Dauphiness, Marie Antoinette had often expressed a desire for a country residence; she loved the quiet life, the solitude of the woods, and the songs of birds. One day, therefore, soon after their accession to the throne, Louis said to his wife: "Now that I am free to indulge your fancies, I beg you to accept Trianon as your own and do with it as you choose. It has always been the abode of the King's favorite; therefore it must be yours."

Marie Antoinette was overjoyed at this and replied gaily, "I accept the gift on one condition — that the King is never to appear there except when he is invited."

Little Trianon is a two-storied structure, about which in those days were clustered eight cottages with thatched roofs, besides a windmill and a schoolhouse which stood near by. In this secluded spot etiquette was disregarded. Every morning Marie Antoinette would leave Versailles on foot and hasten thither to roam through the gardens, gather flowers,

or knit and sew under the trees. Here she led a life as free and unrestrained as that in her ancestral home had been. She churned and made preserves, milked her pet cow, fed the doves and chickens, or worked among her flowers. The evenings were spent in the salon, the doors and windows of which opened into the garden. When there were guests the Queen served tea with her own hands. People came and went without ceremony, sat or walked about, gossiped, and did as they pleased.

The piano always stood open where any one might seat himself at it. The Countess de Polignac played the harp; Marie Antoinette sang little songs which she herself had composed. The verses were in no way remarkable and her voice was weak; but her French audiences were not so frank as Gustavus the Third of Sweden, who once said to her: "For a Queen, you do not sing so badly!"

On Sundays all respectably dressed persons were allowed to enter the gardens of Trianon. They might even dance upon the grass or under a tent, where the Queen often mingled with them and sometimes danced herself to encourage them. Her enemies called this place "the Queen's little Vienna," which offended her as deeply as did her nickname "the Austrian woman."

The King often walked to Trianon quite unattended, and Princess Elizabeth also spent much

time there, but the most frequent guests were the Countess de Polignac and her associates. Every one came in street costume; all sat together at table, walked, played, or lay on the grass. No one rose at the Queen's approach. The people played blind-man's buff and other games in the gardens, jumped over flower-beds and hedges, raced through the rooms till the furniture shook and porcelain vases or statuettes were thrown down and shattered. Once when the Princess de Lamballe was complaining because she had not been invited to Trianon on the preceding evening, the Queen replied, "You did not lose much; there was scarcely anything broken!"

The enmity that pursued Marie Antoinette from her first appearance in France found fresh food in this new toy of hers. One of the principal accusations made against her at her trial was the enormous sums she was said to have expended on her favorite residence; and at the outbreak of the Revolution there was a strong prejudice against her in all parts of France on account of her extravagance and supposed immoral life.

People flocked to see little Trianon, but no one believed in its apparent simplicity. Tales had been told of rooms with diamond-studded walls, and when none of the expected magnificence was discovered, it was supposed the most gorgeous apartments had not been shown. As a matter of fact the

place was by no means so elegant or costly as the Queen's enemies represented it. There are proofs to show that the whole outlay on the house and gardens in the course of twelve years did not exceed two million francs; which was little, compared to the expenses of the court and the incredible sums that were squandered in other ways.

Nevertheless Trianon had its dangers. The life that seemed so innocent and peaceful was in reality a hotbed of intrigue. It was far easier to obtain favors from the Queen here, where she found it difficult to deny her friends, than in the ceremonious atmosphere of Versailles; and here people dared to drop their masks and openly display their cupidity. One of the men who played duets with the Queen aspired to be minister; another who charmed her with his wit coveted the post of ambassador. The Countess de Polignac proved a useful tool in the hands of these schemers. Urged on by them she thrust herself into everything, from the management of the Queen's household to the choice of ministers. Her sister-in-law Diane lived so entirely for her friends that she quite forgot her duties to Princess Elizabeth, who, left to her own devices, fled one day to a convent, and the King himself was forced to bring her back.

Whenever there were visitors at court, a visit to Trianon always formed part of the entertainment

provided for them. Among these foreign princes was Gustavus the Third of Sweden, who afterwards espoused the cause of the unfortunate royal pair with so much warmth and gallantry. He often made long stays in Paris under the name of Count de Haga and was in the habit of going at times to Versailles unannounced, greatly to the embarrassment of the court. On one of the occasions when he suddenly appeared, Louis had gone hunting, and was sent for in great haste. Not expecting their master's return so soon, the attendants were not to be seen when the King entered his chamber, and he was forced to dress himself as best he could. He hung his orders on his breast upside down and exchanged his hunting-boots for house shoes; but unable to find the proper mates, he put one with silver buckles and red heels on the right foot and one with gold buckles and black heels on the left. The Queen was none too well pleased with her husband's appearance, and inquired tartly whether he was dressed for a masquerade or whether he intended to offer the King of Sweden an example of French taste. On another occasion King Gustavus surprised the Queen by appearing unexpectedly at Trianon for dinner. She hastily despatched her waiting woman to the kitchen to find out whether a suitable menu could be prepared for the royal guest; but Gustavus laughed, saying, "Do not trouble

yourself; if there is enough for two, surely there is enough for three." His plain, straightforward ways did not appeal to Marie Antoinette; nor does Gustavus, on his part, seem to have felt any special admiration for her. He openly criticised her singing and playing, and did not attempt to conceal the fact that he found her musical entertainments tedious. One evening when the Queen had refused to dance, saying she was too old, he asked her jestingly if she had not been fond of dancing when she was young — a question scarcely pleasing to the sovereign — at that time barely twenty-eight years of age.

Chapter XII

Gambling and Theatricals

HAD the customs in France been like those to which she had been accustomed at home, Marie Antoinette would have been much happier. Her tastes being domestic, she would then no doubt have found her pleasures in her own family circle. But thrown as she was into the midst of a corrupt court, almost a stranger to her own husband, with no serious interests and with a passionate love of pleasure, she was forced to seek diversion from without. As Dauphiness, she showed no disposition toward extravagance; up to the time of her accession to the throne she could boast of never having made a debt. Dazzled by her new greatness and urged on by her friends, she flung herself, as we have seen, into a perfect vortex of pleasures that swallowed up enormous sums. She also developed a passion for jewels. For example, she bought a pair of diamond earrings which cost four hundred thousand francs, and scarcely six months later a bracelet worth two hundred and fifty thousand, besides countless other

pieces, and that at a time when thousands of her subjects were roofless and clamoring for bread.

The charges against Marie Antoinette have been greatly exaggerated, and the dignity with which she bore her misfortunes must command our sympathy and respect; but her wanton extravagance in the face of so much misery is a blot on her memory that can never be effaced.

Gaming at cards being much in vogue at court, the Queen was gradually drawn into that also. At first she played only with her intimate friends, but one day at Fontainebleau she begged permission of the King to send to Paris for a banker for herself and her companions. Louis at first objected, but, weak as usual, finally yielded "just for this once." For thirty-six hours they played without stopping; from that time the Queen became completely absorbed in gambling. She played incessantly, and lost enormous sums. Sometimes her monthly allowance of five hundred gold pieces — her pocket-money, as she called it — would go in a single night. The gowns of the ladies were often so black from the heaps of gold in their laps that they were forced to change them before they could appear in public. Disgraceful scenes and quarrels were of frequent occurrence. The Count d'Artois shrieked with joy when he won, and with rage when he lost. Once it was discovered that the dice were marked

and cheating was going on. Another time when a bundle of bank-notes disappeared, it was proposed to search the pockets of the distinguished players. More than one adventurer made a fortune at the royal tables. An Englishman of large property and small reputation, lately returned from India, who boasted he had two hundred thousand gold pieces to stake, was admitted to the Queen's circle; in a short time he had won over thirty million francs. All this could not but reflect upon the crown. Count Mercy blames the Queen severely in his letters, and the King no less, for permitting such an offence against royal dignity and such a cause for public complaint and scandal.

It is plain from the foregoing that Marie Antoinette cared little for the society of clever or learned women; she much preferred the admiration and flattery of the opposite sex to admonition or advice from her own. Her education was most imperfect, as we have seen. As Queen she was rarely known to open a book, nor did she improve in any way the advantages her position offered her. The moment any serious subject was broached, her expression betrayed a lack of interest. Her own conversation was frivolous and disconnected. She jumped from one subject to another and was most interested in lively, amusing gossip about people or events of the

day. Literature received none of the encouragement from her that befitted the Queen of a great nation. She showed no appreciation of the famous poets and philosophers of her adopted country.

Voltaire's visit to Paris was one of the great events of her husband's reign; it excited the attention of the whole city. The great satirist, a king himself in the intellectual world, who died loaded with laurel wreaths and honors, still thirsted, at the age of eighty, for the applause of courts and the smiles of royalty. He had referred to the young Queen of France as "the divine Antoinette," professing the liveliest admiration for her; no sooner had he arrived in Paris than he expressed a desire to be presented to the sovereigns. Louis, however, saw in him only an enemy of Christianity and of Catholicism in particular, while Marie Antoinette cared as little for his literary achievements as she feared the power of his pen. Although besieged with requests to receive him at Versailles, for once the Queen was firm in her refusal, and the doors of the court remained closed — a terrible blow to his vanity, which was almost as great as his name. One of his friends consoled him thus:

"Permit me to describe what would have been your experience at Versailles: the King with his usual tact would have laughed in your face; the Queen would have talked of nothing but the

theatre; the Count de Provence would have inquired into your revenues, and his wife would have quoted one of your verses; the Countess d'Artois would have said nothing, and her husband would have discussed "La Pucelle"[1] with you."

The enthusiasm of the Parisians soon made Voltaire forget the coldness of the royal pair. "For some weeks," says the Count de Ségur, "there have been two courts in France, that of Louis the Good at Versailles, which has grown very dull, and that of Voltaire in Paris, where enthusiastic homage is daily offered." The philosopher of Ferney was made such an object of worship that echoes of it at last reached the ears of the Queen and roused her curiosity; but she could not understand it at all. When the poet was publicly crowned at the Théâtre Français with a laurel wreath, murmuring, overcome with emotion, "You will suffocate me with roses," Marie Antoinette sat in her box at the opera near by. She had not even thought it worth while to visit the theatre that evening.

She also regarded with equal indifference the great exponent of naturalism, Jean Jacques Rousseau. Grimm tells of a visit made by the court one day to the gardens of Ermenonville. The Queen remained for some time on the Island of Poplars

[1] A celebrated satirical poem by Voltaire.

where Rousseau was buried, prompted, one would suppose, by interest in the dead philosopher. But no such honor was destined for his memory. She looked at the tomb, found its execution tasteful and the spot beautiful — then suddenly began to talk of other things. She showed no further interest in the man to whose honor the monument was erected.

Marie Antoinette's one talent and her chief interest in those days was music, the only art she may really be said to have fostered. With all her fickleness in other respects she never lost her love for it; even as Queen she still continued her music and singing lessons. She also learned to play the harp, and frequently gave concerts in her apartments. It is true she never became proficient on any instrument, but she played readily at sight and loved to pose as a connoisseur in music.

"I do not like French music," she declared one day; "there is something shallow and empty about it that affects me disagreeably."

To please her, the director of the Grand Opera sent to Vienna for Gluck to lead the performances in Paris. To her he was not only the great composer but also a reminder of her home and youth. At the first production of his "Iphigenia in Tauris" the Dauphiness sat in the royal box loudly applauding her old master. But the French

public did not altogether share her taste. The composer's masterpiece met with a cold reception. The production took place at the beginning of the year 1774, when the Countess du Barry was still at the height of her power. Having taken the Italian composer Piccini under her protection, a bitter rivalry developed between the adherents of the two schools. Strife even broke out in families, and friends were separated. Quarrels constantly occurred in the theatre, and it sometimes became necessary to separate people by force. Piccini's admirers would stop their ears at the sound of Gluck's music, while the latter's adherents shed tears of delight over their master's melodies.

When Marie Antoinette became Queen she had an annual pension of six thousand francs bestowed on Gluck and granted him the *entrée* to her morning levees. His next opera, "Alceste," shared the fate of the first in spite of the Queen's presence and applause. Embittered and discouraged, the master determined to leave France after a stay of five years, but not until his royal pupil had extracted from him a promise to return, and given him the title of Music-master to the royal children.

The first singer to undertake the title role in Gluck's "Armida" was Madame Saint-Huberti, a German by birth and the principal artist in French Opera at that time. Gluck himself rehearsed the

part with her, and Marie Antoinette professed the greatest admiration for her talent. Mlle. Bertin had orders to furnish all the singer's costumes, and the Queen repeatedly paid her debts, which were not always small by any means.

A dancer named August Vestris, famous all over Europe at that time, stood equally high in royal favor. "The god of dancing," as he was called, was much puffed up by his popularity, and sometimes refused to appear at the last moment. One evening when the Queen was present, the young man indulged one of these caprices and was instantly arrested. Terrified at the consequences of his son's presumption, the father, an equally celebrated dancer in his day, besought the Queen's pardon. "My son was not aware that your Majesty had honored the performance with your presence," he declared. "Had he known it, how would it have been possible for him to refuse to dance before his august patroness? I am in despair at this misunderstanding between the Vestris and the Bourbons, who have always been upon such friendly terms."

Marie Antoinette was highly amused at the old dancer's arrogance, and despatched one of her pages to order the release of Vestris, who then returned to the stage and exerted his whole art to please the sovereign. As she was leaving her box, the two men pressed forward to thank her.

"Monsieur Vestris," said the Queen, addressing the father, "you never danced so well as your son has this evening."

"Naturally, your Majesty," replied the old man, "for I did not have a Vestris for a teacher."

From her earliest youth Marie Antoinette had shown a marked fondness for the theatre. Most French palaces at that time contained a small theatre; during the twenty years of her reign private theatricals were more than ever in vogue. The Queen had a small stage erected at Trianon, where actors from Paris originally appeared; but she was soon tempted to take part herself. It was very properly agreed that the company should consist solely of ladies and the Count d'Artois, who was always at hand when any sort of amusement was in prospect; while no one was to be admitted to the hall except the King, the Count de Provence, and the royal princesses. This rule was soon broken. At the instigation of her husband the Countess de Provence refused to take part, upon the pretext that she considered it beneath her dignity; in retaliation for which, Marie Antoinette allowed several courtiers to appear with them at the first performance and gave her ladies permission to be present with their sisters and daughters. At first the number of spectators did not exceed forty, but officers of the guard with their families and others were gradually

admitted, until the audience increased to two or three hundred every night.

Only short pieces were played to begin with, but with the assistance of actors from Paris more ambitious attempts followed. Marie Antoinette's youth and freshness lent a charm to these performances; great as her distaste for study was, she always memorized her parts perfectly. She acted every kind of role except that of Queen, which she would never take; her rich, full voice was naturally of so pleasing a tone that it was not necessary to put much feeling into it to make it effective.

In spite of their inexperience the actors appear to have done very well. The Prince de Ligne pronounced the Queen's acting very bad; Grimm, on the contrary, declares that "the plays at Trianon were better than amateur theatricals usually are."

In after days Marie Antoinette regretted bitterly that her love for the theatre had carried her so far as to associate with actors and play their parts. It was most unfitting for the Queen of a great country to turn herself into a soubrette, and its effect was doubly unfortunate on the public, who, denied admittance to these performances, saw in them only a mockery of the suffering that prevailed throughout the land. Innumerable tales were told regarding them, which were universally believed. The Queen was said to have acted so badly that the King

hissed his illustrious consort; whereupon Marie Antoinette shouted from the stage, "Be quiet, barbarian!" Others told how, finding her audience too small, the Queen had admitted a company of soldiers to the theatre that they might admire and applaud her; not only that, but she had so far forgotten her dignity as to step before the footlights directly after the performance and say to the soldiers: "I have done what I could to please you, and only wish it might have been better, so that you might have had more pleasure!" And this story was unfortunately true.

Chapter XIII

Joy after Sorrow

COMPLETELY as Marie Antoinette gave herself up to the pursuit of pleasure, it is only fair to admit that much may be said in her defence; for whatever may have been her faults her husband was not without his also. Louis's coldness was a disappointment to the Dauphiness, and his reserve became a sorrow to the Queen. The people felt injured that no heir had been born to the throne, a fact which caused her the greatest distress, for she loved children and longed for them. The Countess d'Artois, whose marriage had taken place after hers, had long since become a mother; at the sight of her with her children Marie Antoinette could scarcely restrain her tears. The passion with which she flung herself into the quest of amusement sprang largely from a desire to forget this sorrow and conceal the void in her life, for she felt that as long as she remained childless she would be looked upon as a stranger in France.

Wounded to the heart by the indifference of the King, whom she grew to regard with contempt as lacking in spirit and character, and craving the affection denied her by her husband, it is not to be wondered at that alone in a strange land she was led into errors for which she has been too harshly judged. Both as mother and sovereign, Maria Theresa was most unreconciled to this state of affairs. So long as Marie Antoinette remained childless it would be impossible for her to acquire the influence necessary to the interests of Austria, and instead of soothing her daughter's trouble she constantly aggravated it by continually dwelling on the subject.

Marie Antoinette bore her mother's reproaches meekly, unjust as they were, and never but once did a word escape her to betray the real state of her feelings. When the Duchess de Chartres had a child born dead, the Queen envied her. "Sad as this is," she said to her, weeping, "I would gladly be in your place."

As time went on Louis began to feel more and more drawn toward the Austrian Archduchess, in spite of his shyness. The first sign of warmer feeling was a pressure of the hand when he retired every evening, so powerful that Marie Antoinette could sometimes scarcely repress a cry of pain. This was followed later, greatly to her surprise, by a kiss on

her forehead. In after years the Queen reproached herself bitterly for having lacked the courage to confess to her husband her loneliness and need of affection; she would have been spared much grief over his apparent coldness, and perhaps have escaped calumny.

In spite of his reserve, Louis was always kind to his wife and liked to please her; whether from his deference to her quicker wit, his fear of opposition, or his secret affection for her, as many believed, it is certain she acquired such an influence over him that he appeared more like an inferior to her than a sovereign. But Marie Antoinette's passionate longing for happiness was not to be satisfied with Louis's timid, half-embarrassed tenderness; they might never have become attached to each other had it not been for the Queen's eldest brother, who at length succeeded in breaking the ice and bringing them together.

In 1777 Emperor Joseph the Second made a visit to France under the name of Count Falkenstein. This was the second of Marie Antoinette's relatives to visit her, for her youngest brother Maximilian had been there some years before. The weak-minded youth had scandalized the court, made himself a laughing-stock to the people, and caused his sister much embarrassment by his stupidity and tactlessness. Joseph, on the contrary, seemed

destined to bring good fortune to France. All classes were enthusiastic in his praises. Salons were charmed with the originality of his mind, fish-wives paid him compliments; art, philosophy, and literature vied in doing honor to the gracious and affable young Emperor. Even Aunt Adelaide, bitterly as she hated the Hapsburgs, was completely won over; finding herself alone in the room with him one day, she flung her arms about his neck and kissed him.

Marie Antoinette's joy at seeing her favorite brother again was boundless. Seven years had elapsed since her departure from home, and the innocent child of Schönbrunn had become the brilliant young Queen of Versailles. Joseph was charmed with her and proved a good friend and counsellor. He was not blind to her failings, however, which he criticised somewhat too openly. Instead of expressing his disapprobation in private he often did so in the presence of the whole court.

One morning, on visiting his sister he found Leonard just finishing a towering structure of flowers and feathers upon her head. Marie Antoinette asked him if he did not think her hair well dressed.

"Yes," he replied, curtly.

"Do you not think it becoming?" she persisted.

"To speak frankly," answered her brother, "your coiffure is much too flimsy to support a crown."

Joseph urged his sister to read more, to be less frivolous and imprudent, and above all to show a greater respect for her royal dignity. He strongly disapproved also of her extravagance and love of card playing. "One thing is certain," he wrote to his mother, Maria Theresa, "if this continues, the court of France will soon degenerate into a gambling-den." In spite of their differences, however, the brother and sister were heartbroken when the time came to part. "I leave Versailles with regret and with the greatest admiration for my sister," writes Joseph; "she is altogether lovely and captivating, and I was forced to summon all my strength of mind to bid her farewell."

Louis's former indifference had by this time grown into a passionate devotion for his wife; after all these years of marriage, their honeymoon had just begun. In August, 1778, it was announced that the nation's hopes were at last to be realized. Marie Antoinette's cup of happiness was full. She wrote joyfully to all her relatives of the expected event and could talk of nothing else. All France was wild with joy. For a time the voice of calumny was silenced, and the public enthusiasm recompensed the Queen for the reproaches she had so long been forced to endure. Masses were said in all the churches and convents; daily prayers were

offered up throughout the kingdom for the Queen and the expected heir. People flocked to the palace, deputations were sent to offer blessings, and magnificent entertainments took place in honor of the event.

Yet there were some who did not share in the general rejoicings. Marie Antoinette's happiness gave great offence to the King's aunts. The King's brothers and their wives maintained an outward appearance of becoming interest, but in secret they were far from pleased. The ministers who had hitherto ruled the King began to fear the power of Marie Antoinette; and those persons at court who were not of Mme. Polignac's party resented the prospect of being cast into the shade.

The anxiously awaited event took place on the twentieth of December, 1778, when the Queen gave birth to a daughter, afterwards Duchess d'Angoulême. Marie Antoinette had hoped for an heir to the throne and was bitterly disappointed; nevertheless she was at last the mother of a living, healthy child. "Poor little one!" she cried, clasping her first-born to her heart, "you shall be none the less dear to me if you are not the longed-for Dauphin. A son would have belonged to the State; you shall be all my own."

The King was so overcome with the joy of

MME. ADELAIDE

(*From a painting by Mme. Lebrun*)

fatherhood and pride in his new dignity that he did not know how to express his feelings. He ran from his wife's bedside to his daughter's cradle, held the babe in his arms, laid it down again, carried it to its mother, and endeavored by his tenderness to make Marie Antoinette forget her disappointment. Rather than leave her he even abandoned hunting, one of the few amusements in which he indulged, and every morning he was the first at her bedside, where he spent all his time. Every few moments he would go and look at his daughter, whom he was never weary of gazing at or caressing.

At her christening the Princess received the names, Marie Thérèse Charlotte. The ceremony took place in Paris, which was illuminated in honor of the event. Free performances were held in all the theatres, and gifts were distributed among the people. But there was less public enthusiasm than had been expected; while famine was abroad in the land and taxes were crushing the people, the arrival of a princess aroused little interest. The day after her birth one of the court ladies said, "The Queen must do better next time"; and the Empress Maria Theresa wrote in a confidential letter, "This little Maria Theresa was not needed." She became more than ever bent upon having a grandson in France after this, not only in order to establish her daughter's position firmly, but to secure her

domestic happiness. "I am consumed with impatience," she wrote to Marie Antoinette, "and my age will not permit me long to wait. We must have a Dauphin — we absolutely must!"

This desire was not to be fulfilled during her lifetime. Worn with the cares and troubles of sovereignty, the Empress's health had long been failing; on the twenty-fourth of November, 1780, she was taken seriously ill. The physicians gave no hope, the last sacrament was administered, but indomitable as ever she refused to yield, even at the approach of death; she remained standing to the end. She discussed various questions and arranged details concerning the government of the realm with her son Joseph, gave directions as to her burial, and left loving messages to her subjects, preserving her strength of character and clearness of mind to the very last. Just before her death she left a blessing to each of her children, absent and present. At the name of Marie Antoinette her voice faltered and her eyes filled with tears. In this hour of parting she seemed aware that dangerous times were in store for her favorite child.

On the sixth of December, 1780, the news of her decease reached Versailles. Marie Antoinette's grief was indescribable. For twelve days she shut herself up and could talk of nothing but her mother,

— her virtues, her counsels, her example. Nor was she this time alone in her sorrow. In spite of the universal prejudice in France against the house of Hapsburg, only expressions of the highest esteem and grief for the dead Empress were heard. In Germany her loss was deeply mourned; even her inflexible enemy Frederick the Second did honor to her memory.

The following year a Dauphin was born to France, and the whole country went mad with joy. People laughed and cried, strangers embraced one another; even those who had been hostile to the Queen caught the general enthusiasm. For a whole month the rejoicings continued, and in those days Marie Antoinette seemed to have reached the summit of earthly happiness. Her fondest hopes realized, beloved by her husband, the mother of an heir to the throne, surrounded by the throng of friends and admirers that always attend the fortunate, seemingly beloved and admired by all, she was for the time the foremost figure in the first court of Europe.

Chapter XIV

The Queen as Mother

WITH the dignity of motherhood, Marie Antoinette felt that new duties were required of her. The artificial life of the court had long since become wearisome, and after the birth of her children she gave up most of the frivolities that had hitherto occupied her time. She still committed some imprudences, it is true, for habits of long standing are not to be thrown off in a day, but it was evident that she strove to lead a different life. Realizing the defects of her own education, she was anxious to avoid the mistakes of which Maria Theresa had been guilty; though devoted to her children, she was a wise and judicious mother.

Three years after the birth of the Dauphin (1784) she presented the royal house with another prince, afterwards the unfortunate so-called Louis the Seventeenth, who received the title of Duke of Normandy; and the following year a princess, Sophie Beatrice, was born, but lived only a year.

The Queen's mind now seemed for the first time to turn to serious matters. She became more regular in her religious duties and had long, earnest conversations with her confessor and other priests. She completely altered her style of dress, and the towering coiffures with their flowers and feathers were abandoned.

"I shall soon be thirty years old," she said to Mademoiselle Bertin; "it is not likely that any one will remind me of the fact, but I have not forgotten it."

Her intimate friends were terrified at this change in her, and began to fear lest their influence should be replaced by that of the priests. Anything approaching pride of birth or arrogance was sternly suppressed in the royal children; the Queen was especially strict with her eldest daughter. Dearly as she loved her, she was not blind to her faults. "Marie Thérèse, now six years old, has a difficult disposition to deal with," writes Marie Antoinette in one of her letters; "her pride is inordinate, and she is only too well aware that the blood of Maria Theresa and Louis the Fourteenth flows in her veins."

She humored none of this child's caprices. Every morning at ten o'clock the Princess was taken to her mother's room, where she had lessons for an hour. One day "Madame Royal" was not in the mood

for study, and asked that her tutor might be dismissed, pleading a headache as excuse. "Very well, my child," said the Queen, "but if your head aches you must go to bed and have no dinner." After a time the Princess got hungry and begged for something to eat, but was reminded of her headache and the Queen's orders. At last her hunger became so unendurable that she confessed her falsehood and begged her mother's forgiveness, which was not granted until she had taken the hour's lessons she had tried to evade.

When the Princess was to be confirmed, the Queen had several young girls of her own age prepare for the ceremony with her and permitted no distinction to be made between them. "My children have always been accustomed to confide in me and confess any wrong-doing," she wrote to Madame de Tourzel, "and when forced to reprove them I appear more grieved than angry. They have been taught that 'yes' or 'no' once spoken is irrevocable, but I am careful to give a reason for my decisions that they can understand, that they may not think them merely the result of caprice."

The Princess de Guéméné was the first governess of the royal children. Her husband, who had been made Lord Chamberlain, was once enormously wealthy, but their boundless extravagance gradually reduced them to bankruptcy, and he was forced to

borrow money at high interest to satisfy the demands of his creditors. At last it became impossible for him to maintain this position any longer, and he was obliged to stop all payments, involving in his downfall a large number of tradespeople, retainers, and workingmen who had entrusted the great lord with all their hard-earned savings. After this scandalous affair it was impossible for his wife to continue as governess to the royal children, and the Queen was anxious to confer the position upon Madame Polignac. Although terrified at the responsibility involved, and well aware of the jealousy it would arouse and the enemies it would make for her if she accepted it, she yielded finally to the wishes of her sovereign and the importunities of her family, and the appointment was made, thus placing Madame de Polignac at the summit of her ambitions and her power. Instead of the modest abode that had usually sufficed for royal governesses in former reigns, she occupied a splendid palace, which was the favorite resort of Her Majesty. "Here I can be myself!" Marie Antoinette was wont to declare. She spent whole days at her friend's house, which soon became a rendezvous for all the great personages of the kingdom. Had it not been for the absence of the royal guard, one might have imagined himself in the King's and Queen's own salon.

The favorite's situation was not altogether a pleasant one. Marie Antoinette, it is true, appeared to divide her affections equally between her children and their governess, particularly in the earlier days of their friendship; but the feeble health of the Dauphin made the governess's task one of great difficulty and anxiety. From a handsome, robust child the little Prince had become pale, thin, and prematurely bent. One shoulder grew higher than the other, a hump formed on his back, and with the loss of physical strength came a decrease in mental vigor. His mother, who had once been so proud of her oldest son, now jealously guarded him from strange eyes, lest sport should be made of the future occupant of the throne, whose shrunken legs could hardly support his weight. However selfish Marie Antoinette may have been in other respects, it must be said to her credit that she spared herself no sacrifice to humor the feeble and exacting child, or shield him from any source of irritation.

His tutor, the Duke de Harcourt, and his wife, who were bitterly jealous of Madame Polignac, succeeded in turning the Dauphin, too, against his mother's friend. Young as he was, he would order her from the room, refuse to accept anything from her hand, and treat all her suggestions with the most evident contempt. The governess complained bitterly of the Harcourts' persecutions, and Marie

MARIE ANTOINETTE and her children

(*From a painting by Mme. Lebrun*)

Antoinette was much disturbed by their hostility. She did everything in her power to overcome her son's prejudice, and might eventually have succeeded had not a shameful calumny turned the heart of her own child against her. A malicious report was circulated by her enemies that the physical infirmities of her eldest son had caused the Queen to transfer her affection to the younger prince, who was stronger and better formed than his unfortunate brother. Harcourt was base enough to make use of this lie for his own ends. He advised his pupil to taste nothing that had not been previously examined by the physicians, and hinted openly that some woman near to the Dauphin was anxious to shorten his days. This infamous slander made so deep an impression on the diseased mind of the young Prince that he could never look at his mother from that time without betraying fear of her.

Marie Antoinette's elevation of the Polignacs to a power and position usually enjoyed only by those of the highest rank had caused displeasure among the great families of France, who could not forgive her having slighted them in favor of the friends they looked upon as far beneath them. Those who were not invited to Trianon no longer troubled themselves to go to Versailles, and the palace was deserted. The ladies-in-waiting, who were required to

be present on Sundays and on state occasions only, vied with one another in maligning not alone the members of Marie Antoinette's private circle, but the Queen herself, who distributed her favors so unequally and so unjustly.

The little town that had been the scene of Louis the Fourteenth's triumphs, whither people had flocked from all parts of Europe to study court customs and etiquette, had become toward the end of Louis the Sixteenth's reign a mere village, visited with reluctance and departed from as speedily as possible. On week days the courtyard of the palace, the antechambers, and the state apartments, formerly filled with brilliant assemblages, were so deserted that a stranger would have supposed the King absent. Only greed and ambition remained. People no longer sought the protection of the sovereigns, but fawned on those who were known to possess royal favor. Louis the Sixteenth, whose accession had been hailed with such rejoicings, was now declared to be without either the virtues or the qualities of a King. By far the greater part of public disfavor fell upon Marie Antoinette, who had shown much more disregard for popular prejudice than had her husband.

Beaumarchais's "Marriage of Figaro," which, as it first appeared, was filled with stinging satires on the royal family, did much to strengthen the feeling

against the Queen throughout the kingdom and among all classes. For a long time the King refused to permit the production of the piece, but this opposition only served to whet public curiosity. The play was read in all the salons, and Beaumarchais had the audacity to declare that despite the King's prohibition it should be produced, were it even in the Cathedral of Notre Dame. The Count de Provence pronounced it admirable and laughed so loudly when it was read to him that he could be heard in the street without; the Queen could not understand why her husband should attach such importance to the performance of a play, while the upper classes were eager to see their own follies and weaknesses held up before them on the stage. Overruled by popular opinion, Louis at last yielded and reluctantly gave his consent to the production of the piece in 1784, greatly to the joy of the public, whose curiosity to see the "Marriage of Figaro" was boundless.

"The play will be a fiasco," some one remarked to the actress Sophie Arnould before the performance.

"Then it will be a fiasco fifty times in succession!" replied the famous artist. And she was right, for it was played not fifty, but one hundred times in succession. At eight o'clock in the morning long lines of people would be waiting before the theatre to buy tickets. "Even more amusing than

my play," declared the poet, "is the luck it has met with." It abounded with veiled attacks on the royal family and spite against the upper classes; in the heat of his first anger the King ordered Beaumarchais imprisoned, not in the Bastille but at St. Lazare, which was still more degrading. Public indignation was so aroused by this that Louis repented his impetuosity; Marie Antoinette, anxious to make amends, determined to have the poet's next piece produced at Trianon and invited him to be present at the performance. This was a triumph for the author, but an imprudence on the part of the Queen. Small as was the number of spectators who witnessed the production of "The Barber of Seville," it was large enough to spread abroad the exciting news of how a royal prince (the Count d'Artois took the leading part) had uttered, in jest it is true, but from the Queen's own stage, the most virulent protests against the nobility and sovereignty of France.

Chapter XV

The Diamond Necklace

AMID all the general discontent and disturbance in the year 1785 an attack was made against the Queen's honor, to which her enemies conspired to give publicity and which really proved the beginning of her misfortunes. The principal characters in the famous story of the Queen's necklace were the Countess de la Motte-Valois and Louis, Prince de Rohan, Cardinal and chief prelate of the court of France.

The Countess de la Motte, a handsome, clever, and most designing woman, claimed descent from the house of Valois through Baron Saint-Remy, a natural son of King Henry the Second. Her lofty birth did not prevent her mother from eloping with a common soldier, and her father ended his wretched existence in a charity hospital. Jeanne Saint-Remy-Valois had come to Paris to beg for alms and was discovered on the streets by a benevolent woman, who adopted her and gave her an education. The young girl soon deserted her benefactress to marry Count de la Motte, a man of bad

repute, repulsive in appearance, and heavily in debt. Without money or position, proud of her name but humbled by her poverty, Madame de la Motte became possessed of an insatiable desire for luxury at any price. She sent petitions without number and repeatedly visited Versailles and Luciennes, where the Countess du Barry resided, but all in vain. On one occasion she succeeded in obtaining entrance to the Countess de Provence's antechamber, where she pretended to fall in a swoon, but even this piece of acting failed in its purpose; again, when she attempted during a procession to deliver a petition to the Queen, Her Majesty passed by without a glance. Marie Antoinette was able truthfully to declare later that she had never even laid eyes on the Countess de la Motte.

The second person chiefly concerned in the affair of the necklace, Prince Louis de Rohan, was a member of one of the noblest families of France. Shortly after the marriage of Marie Antoinette he was made ambassador to the court of Austria, a choice that could scarcely have been more unfortunate. Dissolute, extravagant, and without any of the requirements for such a position, he not only proved useless as a diplomat, but was so personally objectionable to Maria Theresa that she did not hesitate to express her disapproval of his conduct both as a diplomatist and a priest. In his attempts

to dazzle Vienna by his display of luxury he soon became involved in financial difficulties, to relieve which he made use of his privileges as ambassador and smuggled so boldly that the Austrian government was forced to interfere. In a single year there was more silk sold at the French embassy than in Paris and Lyons together.

One of the first steps taken by Louis the Sixteenth after his accession was the recall of Rohan from Vienna, and neither of the sovereigns would grant him an audience on his return. Marie Antoinette was unable to shake off a feeling that this man was to bring misfortune to her; in what way it was impossible naturally for her to foresee, but never was a presentiment better founded. No sooner had the ex-diplomat returned to Paris than his relatives, among whom were Marshal Soubise, the Countess de Marsan, and the Princess de Guéméné, bestirred themselves to secure new honors and revenues for him. Braving the Queen's coldness and the King's displeasure, they finally succeeded by their persistence and Rohan became an archbishop and Grand Almoner of France, while at the intercession of the King of Poland, the Pope made him a cardinal. The Queen did all in her power to prevent his appointment to the chief prelacy, but her influence was small at that time, and the powerful family of Rohan-Soubise overruled the weak King's

objections. Cardinal Rohan, with all his frivolity and extravagance, was the vainest of men and felt the coldness of the sovereigns keenly. Thwarted in his ambition as a courtier by their neglect, he tried in every possible way to gain the Queen's favor; he wrote her letter after letter, but she would not even condescend to open them, and despite all his efforts he was never able to obtain a word or a glance from Her Majesty. All the memoirs of the time, as well as the records of the trial, confirm this fact.

His failures did not discourage the prelate, but just at this time, unfortunately, he made the acquaintance of Madame de la Motte. He relieved her most pressing needs with gifts of money, and she confessed to him her anxiety to attract the notice of the Queen. About a year after this the Countess informed Rohan that her desire had been gratified and that Marie Antoinette, distressed that a descendant of Henry the Second should have met with such undeserved misfortunes, had taken her under her protection, granted her private interviews, and intrusted her with secret commissions. Although the Cardinal himself was in disgrace, it would have been easy through his influential relations to find out the truth of these statements, but this does not seem to have occurred to him and he believed the Countess implicitly. To complete the deception she showed him letters purporting to

have been written by the Queen, filled with expressions of kindness and affection. Declaring herself touched by the interest Rohan had shown in her, Madame de la Motte offered to use her influence in his behalf and began at once to pose as his benefactress. Her plans were laid by this time, and she pursued them with a skill and perseverance worthy of a better cause.

Rohan was enraptured, and the Countess took care to keep him so. The Queen's prejudice against him was gradually disappearing, she declared, and Her Majesty had even consented to accept a written vindication on his part. With the aid of Madame de la Motte, a supposed correspondence now began between Marie Antoinette and the Cardinal. His letters overflowed with gratitude and admiration; hers were kind and friendly. They were written by a friend of the Count's, an ex-police officer named Rétaux de Villette, who did not even take the trouble to imitate the Queen's handwriting. Rohan was far too hopeful to be suspicious; the only thing lacking to crown his happiness was a personal assurance of forgiveness from his royal mistress. This greatly embarrassed the Countess, but he urged her so strongly that she finally promised him an interview with Her Majesty, not an audience at Versailles but an evening meeting in the palace gardens. The Cardinal was overjoyed.

Night after night he walked in the garden, anxiously awaiting the moment that was to crown his fortunes. At last, late one evening, the Countess appeared.

"Come quickly!" she cried, "the Queen has sent for you!" Rohan hurried after her to a dark pathway near a hedge, where he found a lady dressed all in white. She handed him a rose, murmuring: "You know what this betokens!"

At that moment a man hastened toward them. "Beware!" he whispered, "yonder come the Countesses of Provence and Artois!"

The lady quickly vanished behind the hedge, while the Cardinal remained upon the spot, convinced that he had seen Marie Antoinette and heard her voice.

The unsuspecting prelate little dreamed that Madame de la Motte, to whom he had shown nothing but kindness, was using him merely as a tool. Moreover, Cagliostro, a famous quack, regarded by many as a supernatural being, and in whom he had implicit confidence, had foretold to him that a certain correspondence would prove most fortunate and bring him into favor again, but that his whole happiness depended on his silence and patience. The reader will have guessed by this time that the woman seen by the Cardinal in the garden was not the Queen.

While he was pressing the Countess for a meeting with Marie Antoinette, her husband had noticed a girl in the street who bore a striking resemblance to Her Majesty. He followed and made acquaintance with this person, who proved to be a Mademoiselle le Guay from one of the small theatres in Paris, known among her associates by the name of Oliva. A few days later the Count visited her and informed her that a lady of rank desired to see her and had commissioned him to arrange a meeting as soon as possible. That evening Madame de la Motte herself appeared.

"You do not know me," she began, "but I must beg you to trust me. I am wholly in the confidence of the Queen, and she has asked me to find some one who will be ready to do her a service when the time comes. I have chosen you. If you will agree to my proposal, I will give you fifteen thousand francs, and you may look for a still greater reward from Her Majesty."

To prove the truth of her words she showed some of the letters written by the Cardinal. These convinced the girl, and although greatly astonished at the honor shown her, she agreed to do whatever was desired of her. At an appointed time the Count de la Motte appeared with his accomplice, Rétaux de Villette, in a coach, and the three drove to Versailles, where they were met by the Countess

at the hotel where she was in the habit of staying. The two men disappeared for a time, but soon returned to inform Oliva that the Queen was pleased to hear of her arrival and looked forward to seeing her the next day.

"What am I to do there?" inquired the girl.

"That you will learn to-morrow," was the mysterious reply. That was the day set for the meeting between Rohan and the pretended Queen. The descendant of Henry of Valois prepared the actress for this interview with her own hands. She dressed her in a white gown over a pink petticoat, threw a white mantle over her shoulders, arranged her hair like the Queen's, and, last of all, put a letter into her hand.

"I will go with you to the palace gardens," she said, "where a gentleman of the highest rank will approach you. You are to give him this letter with a rose and say to him, 'You know what this betokens!' That is all that will be required of you."

This meeting we have already described. In her confusion, Oliva forgot to deliver the letter. She took her departure at once, rejoiced that she had been able to do the Queen a service so easily, without an afterthought apparently of the comedy in which she had played a part.

Madame de la Motte's labors were by no means

LOUIS XVI.

(*From a painting by Duménil*)

ended, however. She was now about to reap the reward of her pains. A month after this secret meeting the Cardinal received a letter ostensibly from Marie Antoinette in which she expressed a desire for the sum of sixty thousand francs for charitable purposes. The Queen's wish was law to Rohan, who promptly delivered the money to the Countess, her usual messenger, in whom he still had undiminished confidence. Instead of the promised fifteen thousand francs, Oliva received only four thousand with the assurance that Her Majesty was well pleased with the way in which she had performed her part; the larger part was devoted to the support of the La Motte family. Three months later, the Queen was again in need of money. This time she asked for one hundred thousand francs, and the Cardinal complied without question. The La Mottes now began to live in great style, employed more servants, bought a coach and horses, and reports of the favor enjoyed by the Countess with the Queen were circulated far and wide.

We now come to the second chapter of the story. The court jewellers, Böhmer and Bassange, had made a diamond necklace worth one million six hundred thousand francs, which they were anxious to sell to Her Majesty. One of the courtiers brought it to the King's notice, and he was disposed to get it for his

wife, who had just presented him with their first child. Marie Antoinette admired it exceedingly, but sent it back. The American war had just broken out, and she declared with reason, that it was more necessary to buy war vessels than jewels.

The necklace was sent to every court in Europe, but the price was considered exorbitant and no one would buy it. In despair, Böhmer sought a private audience with the Queen and implored her to help them, declaring they would be ruined unless they could dispose of the ornament, but again he was refused. Having heard much of the intimacy that was said to exist between Her Majesty and the Countess de la Motte, he next went to the latter and begged her to use her influence in his behalf. The Countess made no promises, and Böhmer began to fear this last effort would prove as fruitless as the rest, when, after a lapse of three months, he was informed that the Queen had decided to buy the necklace after all, but not wishing to deal with him personally, would send a person of high rank to arrange the affair. A few days later, Cardinal Rohan appeared in behalf of Her Majesty and an agreement was made. The price was fixed at one million six hundred thousand francs, to be paid in four instalments, at intervals of six months; the fact of the Queen's being the purchaser was to be kept

secret. A contract was drawn up and returned by Rohan, at the bottom of which was written,

"Received,

MARIE ANTOINETTE OF FRANCE."

Böhmer was not familiar with the Queen's handwriting, and the Cardinal was too important a personage to excite suspicion, so the jeweller delivered the jewels to him without a thought. That evening Rohan, accompanied by his chamberlain bearing the precious casket, went to Mme. de la Motte's hotel at Versailles. Scarcely had he arrived when a man in the royal livery entered with a letter, which the Countess took from him, saying, "This is from the Queen." This servant, whom the Cardinal recognized as the man he had seen in the garden at the time of his supposed interview with the Queen, and who in reality was the accomplice Rétaux de Villette, retired but soon returned, and Rohan saw the necklace delivered to him, without doubting for a moment that it would eventually reach the hands of Marie Antoinette. The next day there was a grand reception at court; both he and the jeweller stationed themselves where they could watch the royal family pass, hoping to see the necklace adorning the Queen's neck. Greatly to their surprise and disappointment, she wore only her old jewels.

Months passed, but the famous necklace never

appeared, while the Cardinal was treated with the same coldness and disdain as before. He could not understand her caprices, but still received most affectionate, reassuring letters, and no suspicion of the truth occurred to him. Meanwhile the necklace had been broken up and the jewels sold in Paris and London. The worthy Countess and her husband now developed the most boundless extravagance; they filled their house with the most costly articles and bought a magnificent villa on the coast, although when Rohan came to visit them they were careful to receive him in a more modest abode.

One day Böhmer chanced to meet the Cardinal, who upbraided him for not having expressed his gratitude to Her Majesty. The jeweller hastened to repair his error. Making out a bill for some small items, he enclosed it in a letter to the Queen thanking her for the enormous purchase she had made, and concluded with the following words: "We are truly rejoiced to know that the most beautiful ornament in existence is in the possession of the loveliest and best of Queens."

Thinking the man must have lost his mind, Marie Antoinette burned the letter and determined to have no more dealings with him. The first day of payment passed, yet no money was forthcoming, but the Countess delivered a small sum to the Cardinal in the Queen's name, requesting him to

procure a temporary delay. Meanwhile Bassange, the other partner, becoming uneasy, had obtained a sight of the Queen's own handwriting, and on comparing it with the signature in possession of the firm, discovered the difference at once. While Böhmer was vainly endeavoring to obtain another audience with the Queen, Bassange went to Mme. de la Motte and threatened her with proceedings. She was prepared for this, however, and had her plans all made. They were quite simple. The Cardinal, who would resort to any means to prevent exposure of an affair which would not only ruin him but make him ridiculous for all time, must be made to pay for the necklace. She confessed to the goldsmith that he had been the victim of a fraud and that the Queen's signature was false, but assured him that Rohan was bound in honor to fulfil the contract, if only to purchase silence in regard to the matter. Leaving Bassange irresolute, she hastened to her ecclesiastical friend and besought his protection against the Queen, who now, she declared, denied ever having received the necklace. The prelate began to suspect the trap in which he was caught, but refused to believe the whole truth. Surely all the events of the past year, her friendly and affectionate letters could not have been inventions of his fancy! He dared not mention his doubts and anxieties to his family, who knew

nothing of his imaginary relations with Marie Antoinette, so he resorted again to Cagliostro for counsel. Far from reassuring him, however, the seer only strengthened his forebodings and advised him either to confess all to the King or make some arrangement with the jewellers as soon as possible.

Böhmer, meanwhile, had at last succeeded in obtaining speech with one of the Queen's ladies-in-waiting, who assured him that Her Majesty had not understood a word of his enigmatical letter. The Queen, being then at Trianon rehearsing her role in "The Barber of Seville," could not receive him, but on her return to Versailles, hearing from the lady-in-waiting of the jeweller's visit, a suspicion occurred to her that perhaps Böhmer was not demented after all, but had been imposed upon. She sent for him the next day, and the whole plot was brought to light. This was on the fifteenth of August, 1785.

Cardinal Rohan was at once summoned; he appeared before the assembled court in his robes of state. He was taken into the King's workshop, where the sovereigns awaited him. Ten years had passed since he had had an opportunity of looking closely at the real Marie Antoinette. He hastily compared her with the lady he had seen in the garden, and his composure completely forsook him.

The Queen had grown stouter in that time and her face was more oval than that of Mlle. Oliva.

"At whose order did you purchase a necklace for the Queen of France?" demanded the King.

"Your Majesty," stammered the Cardinal, "I see, too late, that I have been made a fool of."

"What did you do with this necklace?" continued Louis.

"I supposed the Queen had received it."

"Who gave you the commission to buy it?"

"A lady named La Motte-Valois, who brought me a letter from the Queen; I thought to please Her Majesty by so doing."

"You thought to please me!" cried the Queen, beside herself with anger; "me, who have never addressed a word to you since your first appearance at court! Is it likely that I would have employed a bishop to do the work of servants?"

"I see now that I have been deceived," said the Cardinal. "I will pay for the necklace. My anxiety to serve Your Majesty blinded me. I suspected no fraud."

He drew from his portfolio the document bearing the supposed signature of Marie Antoinette. "That is no more the Queen's handwriting than it is her signature," said the King, after inspecting the paper; "how was it possible for the chief prelate of the kingdom to believe that she would sign herself

'Marie Antoinette of France'? Every one knows that Queens use nothing but their Christian name. I am forced to pronounce you guilty," he continued, "and must have a written vindication. You will find ink and paper in the next room."

Rohan obeyed, but was in such a state of agitation he could scarcely write a legible word. A quarter of an hour later, he returned with a paper which the King took from him, saying, "I hereby pronounce you under arrest."

"Sire," cried the Cardinal, "I will always obey your commands, but spare me the ignominy of a public arrest!"

"It must be," replied Louis, harshly, leaving the room without another word. Rohan was arrested before the eyes of the whole court and taken to the Bastille, but not before he had managed to get word to his private secretary, the Abbé Georgel, to burn all his letters, especially those from Madame de la Motte.

The King's councillor, the Count of Vergennes, wished to avoid antagonizing the aristocracy by permitting such a scandal about one of their number to be made public, but was overruled by the Queen, who in the first heat of her anger believed that Rohan had deliberately planned this intrigue to ruin her. The arrest of the Countess with her husband and accomplice, Rétaux de Villette, soon followed,

while Cagliostro and Mlle. Oliva were also imprisoned. The sensation caused by these events can easily be imagined. A Prince de Rohan under arrest! a Cardinal accused of having fraudulently obtained a diamond necklace for his own uses! It was something unheard of! Both the nobility and the clergy were outraged; the Queen's own friends sided against her openly, and the other members of the royal family blamed the sovereigns severely for the step they had taken. Public sympathy was all in favor of the accused; a hatred arose among the lower classes for royalty, especially for the Queen, who was generally regarded as the real culprit in the affair.

The Cardinal, who had behaved like a fool, was hailed with acclamations when he entered the Hall of Justice and was treated more like a sovereign than a criminal.

The Countess de la Motte, who persistently denied all share in the swindle, was publicly flogged, branded with the letter V (*voleuse* — thief), and sentenced to imprisonment for life at La Salpêtrière. She managed to excite general interest and sympathy, however, and at the end of a year was aided to escape to England. Her husband and Rétaux de Villette were condemned to hard labor for life; Cagliostro was banished from France, while Mlle. Oliva was released as having no knowledge of the

plot. The Cardinal was acquitted, escorted in triumph from the scene of trial, and received the sympathy of the people. The real victim of the affair of the necklace was not Rohan, but Marie Antoinette.

Chapter XVI

Gathering Clouds

FOR years slander in one form or another relentlessly pursued the Queen of France. Every possible thing was used as a weapon against her — her country, her birth, her beauty, her friendships, her tastes. The way had long been prepared; the scandal of the necklace proved the signal for a swarm of fresh libels and coarse attacks upon her. Satirical lampoons were thrust under the King's plate at table. Even his own family made charges against her. A wave of calumny spread throughout the land like a contagious disease. Marie Antoinette herself, with all her frivolity and thoughtlessness, at last became aware of the feeling against her. At the christening of the Duke of Normandy she said sadly, "The shouts of the people are not for me, but for my son!"

That unlucky necklace put an end to her happiness. Henceforth she was to encounter misfortune after misfortune, as if in preparation for the more terrible blows of fate in store for her. Her youngest daughter died. The Dauphin followed not long

after. Friends deserted her and new enemies constantly appeared. The joyous past turned like a phantom against her. Popular fury rose in all its terrible might.

When Choiseul planned the marriage of Marie Antoinette to the Dauphin of France it was with the hope that it would prove a bond of union between the houses of Bourbon and Hapsburg; but in this he had been bitterly disappointed, for hereditary distrust remained undiminished, and Marie Antoinette was looked upon as a spy in the interests of her family. Even the errors of the government were ascribed to her influence. She was held responsible for the lack of money in the treasury, the burden of taxation, the poverty and sufferings of the people. Those who were most in her debt were the first to desert her — a bitter lesson in the school of adversity.

As soon as they saw the Queen's star was sinking, the Polignacs began to make overtures to her enemies. Marie Antoinette no longer dared to visit them without previously ascertaining whom she would meet there, while the Countess, far from feeling pity for her royal mistress, began to be uneasy on her own account. "Just because Your Majesty chooses to visit me, it surely is not necessary that I should close my doors to my friends," she said rudely.

Marie Antoinette still continued to find excuses for the friend she had loved so devotedly, even when obliged to discontinue these visits; but she did once remark in a conversation with the Austrian ambassador that Madame Polignac was so changed she scarcely recognized her any longer.

Richly as they deserved the Queen's defection, the favorite and her associates deeply resented it, not from any affection for her, but because they were loath to lose the benefits they had derived from her favor. They now openly joined the ranks of her enemies. Some of the most malicious verses that appeared, which were sung all over Paris and Versailles, were traced to one of Mme. Polignac's friends who was under special obligations to the Queen.

Her appearance at a theatre was the signal for loud hisses. Painters no longer dared to exhibit her portraits, and caricatures of the sovereigns were sold openly in the street. One of these represented the Queen eating, and the King in the act of draining his glass, while the people stood without, crying with hunger.

At last the time came when the prefect of police was obliged to warn Marie Antoinette that it was no longer safe for her to show herself in the capital. The once gay, pleasure-loving Queen found herself alone and almost friendless, an object of public

detestation, surrounded by treachery, no longer knowing whom to trust. Full of dark forebodings and with visions of the awful fate that awaited her, she shut herself up at Trianon.

Here all was as of old, yet no longer the same. The rooms that once had echoed with joyous laughter were empty and silent; the park where she had spent so many happy hours was bare and leafless. The summer of her life was over, her days of happiness forever past.

Appendix

The following is a chronological statement of the principal events in the life of Marie Antoinette:

1755 Birth of Marie Antoinette.
1770 Marriage to the French Dauphin.
1774 Death of Louis the Fifteenth.
1774 Accession to the throne of Louis the Sixteenth and Marie Antoinette.
1789–1793 Leader of party against the Revolution.
1793 Louis the Sixteenth executed.
1793 Marie Antoinette executed.

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